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. . . He caused his bearers to set down the litter on the ground, and, turning to where Assisi, the home of his youth, rose white upon the hill, gave his blessing to the town which had nurtured and cherished him. P. 283.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

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Still young, he for his lady's love forswore
His father; for a bride whom none approves,
But rather, as on Death, would close the door,
In sight of all the heavenly court that moves
Around the Eternal Father, they were wed.
And more from day to day increased their loves.
She of her first love long bereft, had led
A thousand years and yet a hundred more
By no man sought, life hard and sore bested.

* * * * * *

But lest my hidden words the truth should veil,
Francis and Poverty these lovers were,
Of whom I weave at too great length my tale:
Their concord, of dear love the minister,
Their joyful air, their loving looks and kind;
Did holy thoughts in every spirit stir.

IL PARADISO, Canto II.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE principal events of the following history took place in the beginning of the thirteenth century, of which it seems advisable to give a slight sketch at the commencement, that the reader may be able to place St. Francis in his proper chronological place among those events and personages, which occupy a larger space in history than historians generally are willing to allow, to a man who wielded only a moral influence, and was nothing more than a reformer and a saint. This will be found all the more necessary that it has been the aim of the writer in the work itself, rather to follow, as far as modern custom and authentic facts permit, the simplicity of the popular legend than to attempt any elaborate historical picture.

The thirteenth century opened in the midst of one of those periods of transition of which so many occur in the history of the world—great crises up to which the universe has been working through an entire age, which change all the foundations of society, and settle the nations anew upon an altered basis; against which, the moment it is established, new forces begin to work, mining its foundations, and preparing the

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way for yet another change. The reign of the great Emperor Frederick Barbarossa was over in Germany with all its conflicts; and his less remarkable son had just died, leaving an infant successor king of Naples, and possible heir of the great title of the Roman Emperors, to the guardianship of the Pope. Philip Augustus reigned in France, and King John in England. The Third Crusade, with all its harvest of disappointed hopes and lost lives, was still in progress; and the faithful and orthodox knights of Christendom were taking the Cross, not only against Saladin and his Mahommedan hordes, but against the heretic Albigeois, who were hunted down with greater ferocity than could be employed against the warlike Turks. A certain rude and literal faith, not spiritual, nor even exercising much influence upon morals, yet very true and very intense, was general in Christendom. Philosophy was not current in those days, and scepticism was unknown. The most ferocious noble was capable, in some sudden impulse, of enrolling himself among the Crusaders—making the sacrifice of his home and such domestic affections as he possessed, of his country, and the prosecution of those personal feuds which probably were sweeter to him than any other employment—in order to make up for some great sin he had done, or by way of excusing him to himself for serving God no better. It was still the age of conquest, of miracles, of warfare and strife everywhere, of revolution and counter-revolution, putting down one and raising up another. In Italy, the cities which had been gradually sucking in and subduing the surrounding nobles, and which had but lately won a reluctant admission of their liberties from

the hands of Barbarossa, were building themselves up in proud combativeness, each a power in itself, remorseless, vindictive, easily provoked, prone to attack and to be attacked. The most insignificant among them waged independent war against its neighbour, as if it had been a sovereign state, and all that force and fierce individuality of municipal life which so long distinguished Italy, and which has cost her so much, had already come into being. The long and bitter strife between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the party of the Church and that of the Empire, was also in active existence. But for the moment victory was largely on the side of the Church. A succession of ambitious and able popes had gradually extended the pretensions of the See of Rome from that of a simple Patriarchate to that of supreme authority not only over the Church but over the world. It would be unjust not to allow that this supremacy, most fully attained by Innocent III., who reigned, with much splendour and not without benefit to the world, over Christendom for the first sixteen years of the thirteenth century, was founded upon a great primitive ideal conception of the office of the priest in the world. As in the first humble communities of Christians the pastor was the natural referee in all difficulties, the natural adviser, arbiter, and friend, preventing, by his impartial judgment between brother and brother, the hateful appeal to law and public tribunals which Scripture continually discourages ; so it cannot be doubted the devout imagination of a supreme pastor, to be consulted in the same way by kings and nations, preventing by his influence the still more disastrous appeal to war, watching over the moral character of sovereigns and the tendencies

of their reign as the humble parish priest watches over his flock, was but a development of the early ideal of a priest's duties, and was in itself a great and noble, if utterly Utopian and unrealizable conception. Secular historians, imbued with that faith in the worst aspect of human nature which unfortunately is so often justified, have utterly ignored the possibility of any greater motive than ambition influencing the Gregories and Innocents; while historians on their own side of the question have been apt to claim for them a superhuman purity and loftiness of aim just as far removed from the truth. We may be permitted to believe, however, that the popes were men of their age, like their contemporaries ; that they were not so far in advance of every other intelligence of the time as to see through their own pretensions, and that some honest belief in the moral advantage of an ecclesiastical Court of Appeal, and (supposably) impartial judge between king and king, between nation and nation, was, in them, mingled with their ambition.

However this may be, it is undeniably certain that the Church in the time of Innocent III. was at its highest pinnacle of political greatness, interfering, and having a real power to interfere, in the affairs of nations, giving and taking away crowns almost at its pleasure, holding the terrible threat of excommunication over the head of rebels, doing justice upon some princely culprits whom no other authority could have ruled, and on the other hand, no doubt, intruding into many matters of the highest importance where its influence was useless and mischievous. This influence was objected to, as we find in history, principally by those to whom it was adverse. The prince, or the

noble, or the nation in favour of whom the Pope's decisions were made, never made any remonstrance against the exercise of his power; they believed in it, as probably he did, and thought it a very good thing for the world. He was not to them an impertinent priest, interfering in matters that did not concern him, as, were he taking the same part upon him, he would, in his impotence, appear now. And this fact ought to be taken into consideration by all readers of history. The nineteenth century, when it studies the thirteenth, must consent to put itself, as far as possible, at the point of view held by the latter. To judge it by our present lights, by our present habits of thought, would be of all things the most futile—for there is nothing which so completely hinders a man from understanding his neighbour as the foregone conclusion that that neighbour must be an impostor, a criminal, or a fool.

Religious faith was intense in this age of the world, which by some is regarded as an age of darkness, and by others as one of piety. It was both. It possessed few of the virtues of civilization, had little time for thought and none for speculation, and was marked by all the rudeness of manners and morals, indifference to human life and callousness to suffering which are almost inseparable from continuous and oft-repeated wars. It had, however, one strange advantage over us, in so far that the perennial human worship of Self existed then in so rude and bloodthirsty a form that the most subtle self-excuser could scarcely delude himself, as it is possible to do now in our milder forms of the same vice, that it was a virtue. The robber-baron might find many good reasons for

possessing himself of the domains of his neighbour, or killing him when he met him; but he could scarcely persuade himself that in so doing he had been actuated by the highest motives, and meant nothing but good to his neighbour. The common and general evils of the time were crimes such as no man could mistake or veil, and for which hell-fire blazed visible, or at least purgatory with all its torments. A man would have as soon doubted his own existence as doubted the violent and awful recompense which, if he could not make interest with some pitiful saint, or acquire for himself the intercessions of the Church, awaited him hereafter; and thus to the rude imagination of the common masses the Church was the recognized seller of salvation at a lower or greater price, the only means of escape from the devils and the eternal flames. The very universality, however, and depth of the common faith debased the Church which was recognized by all as the mediator between earth and heaven. The gifts which men poured into her lap to buy her intercessions, her absolutions, the mystic words with which she propitiated an angry God, the rites which were dear to Him upon His cloudy, distant throne—involved the recipient in all the grosser temptations which distinguished her clients, with the additional drawback that proud priests and rich communities professed purity and temperance and humility, virtues to which laymen laid little claim. The lands and legacies and rich donations of many a guilty penitent buying ease to his conscience, and, as he thought, deliverance to his soul, infected as with a moral contagion the ecclesiastic who sold his sacred

services at such a price ; and thus the very materialism of faith, if we may use words which are so paradoxical, wrought its own destruction. The convents were gorged with wealth, the bishops were as great nobles in the land, wielding secular as well as spiritual authority, and even the parish priest, secure in his official influence, was often indifferent of adding to it any spiritual influence over the people, who were already under thrall to him, as their only hope of escape from the terrors of the unseen world.

It was at this moment that Francis of Assisi arose to give a new tone and colour, and develop a new power in the Church. She was at her highest pitch of power, but she might have been also at the last step between triumph and decadence but for the two new apostles—Francis in Italy and Dominic in Spain —who came full of the primitive spirit of the Gospel to renew the religious life, and bring a fresh flood of genuine spiritual influence upon the world. They were very different men, but in their various ways they were both stirred by the same absolute devotion to that Saviour who had come penniless and homeless into the world He was to save, and who had lived the life of a poor man and died the death of a slave. Their mission did not take the form of violent indignation and disgust against the abuses of the Church, and the corruption of her constitution, as has been the way of reformers, chiefly because the influence which moved them was wholly evangelical. They were impelled to follow their Master, literally making, as near as they could in the simplicity of their age, a material copy of His life and work, rather than to demolish the works of others, or point out

how they had gone astray. They were not destructive but constructive reformers. Their mission was to make clear their own path, not to encumber the paths of others. And more especially in the case of the holy man whose life is the subject of this volume, the new path was framed on principles so entirely different from any followed either in the world or the Church, that it was at once a warning and reproach to the latter, a wonder and prodigy to the former, and as such produced such results on Christendom, both secular and ecclesiastical, as it has fallen to the lot of very few individuals to produce.

It will be our attempt in the following pages to show what manner of life it was which Francis lived in the heart of Italy in the thirteenth century, in imitation of his Lord. The sources from which we have drawn are the three original biographies preserved by the Church, and carefully edited by the Bollandist fathers in the *Acta Sanctorum*. The first, by Thomas of Celano, a brother of the Franciscan Order, a man of distinguished attainments, and to whom the noble Latin hymn, the *Dies Iræ*, has been often attributed, was written only three years after the death of Francis, and is therefore the work of a contemporary. The second, written by three of his disciples, calling themselves the Three Companions (Tres Socii) of Francis, is in the nature of an appendix to Celano's narrative, but recapitulates the entire life of the saint, adding some particulars which are wanting in the first biography. Its authors were Ruffino, Angelo, and Leo, brethren in constant communication with Francis, the sharers of his life, and his attendants to the very moment

of his death—witnesses, accordingly, of the most trustworthy description. The third narrative, written thirty-seven years after his death, is by the distinguished and eloquent Bonaventura, one of the greatest ornaments of the Franciscan Order, who had himself in his childhood seen Francis, and who, being commissioned by the Order to write his life, had the fullest access to all documents on the subject. It will be apparent that there are very few historical personages of whom we have such full and trustworthy records. The following extracts from the statements which these three writers prefix to their several histories will give the reader their own explanation of their motives and the means they possessed of accurate information :—

"I desire to relate," says Thomas of Celano, "the acts and life of our most blessed father, Francis, with pious devotion, truth being my guide and master; and since no single memory fully retains the recollection of all things that he taught or did, I have endeavoured to set forth, at the bidding of our gracious lord, Pope Gregory, as far as I have been able, though unskilled in words, those things at least which I have heard from his own mouth, or have learned from faithful and approved witnesses. But would that I were a worthy disciple of him, who ever avoided all obscurities of speech, and brooked no rhetorical ornaments!"

This last prayer is so much the more necessary that good brother Thomas is much addicted to eloquence, and loves to pile epithet upon epithet and high-sounding phrase on phrase. Nothing can be more simple than his narrative of facts; but whenever he has an opportunity for an apostrophe or outbreak of monkish rhetoric, he seizes upon it with effusion. The Three Companions are more sober

in their style. It is thus they announce the purpose which moved them :—

"To the reverend father in Christ, Brother Crescentius, by the grace of God, General Minister (of the Order), Brother Leo, Brother Ruffino, and Brother Angelo, formerly companions, though unworthy, of the most blessed Father Francis, offer their devout and dutiful reverence, in the name of the Lord. Since, by the command of Christ, of the last General Council, and of yourself, the brethren are required to make known such signs and wonders of the most blessed Francis as may be known to them, it has seemed good to us, who, though unworthy, were long conversant with him, to make known to your Holiness, truth being our guide, a few of the many deeds which we have ourselves seen, or have learned through other holy brethren—especially through Brother Giovanni, visitor of the poor Ladies (poor Clares), Brother Illuminato of Arco, Brother Masseo of Marignano, and Brother Giovanni, the companion of the venerable Brother Egidio —who received many of these things from the same holy brother, Egidio—and brother Bernardo of holy memory, the first companions of the blessed Francis. In this we will not content ourselves with narrating only the miracles, which do not constitute, but are simply a proof of holiness, but desire to set forth the chief acts of his life, and the purpose of his pious goodness to the praise and glory of Almighty God."

This was written in 1247, twenty-one years after the death of Francis; the names of the writers, and the brethren to whose authority they refer, the reader will find through all the life of Francis as his constant associates. Bonaventura, who comes last, who had little personal knowledge of the facts, and whose work is confessedly a compilation, is more diffuse. This is how he prefaces his work :—

"Feeling myself unworthy and unable to set forth the life of so venerable a man, most worthy of all imitation, I should in no wise have attempted it, had not the fervent

affection of the brethren urged me on, and the unanimous wish of the General Chapter induced me, and that reverence which I am bound to bear to the holy father compelled me, inasmuch as having been through his prayers and merits, as I ever cherish in my memory, snatched in my childhood from the jaws of death—should I be silent in publishing his praise, I fear the charge of wickedness, as ungrateful. I have too this chief cause of taking upon me this labour, that I, who recognize the life of body and soul as preserved to me by God through him, and know his virtue through my own experience, although I may not fully be able, shall collect as far as possible the virtues of his life, his acts, and words, as fragments partly neglected, partly scattered, that they might not perish with the death of those who had lived with the servant of God.

"In order, then, that the truth of his life, to be handed down to posterity, should appear to me more certainly and clearly, going to the place of the birth, life, and death (departure) of the holy man, I held frequent and diligent conference with his companions who still survive, and especially with certain who knew him well, and were chief followers of his holiness, to whom, on account of their known truth and approved virtue, unhesitating credit must be given."

This is the last of the biographies which can be called contemporary. From those which are simply legendary, produced by the gradually expanding superstition of the Order, and its desire to raise its Founder to the highest fabulous rank of saint-hood, or rather of semi-deity, we have not quoted at all. It is needless to desecrate a fine and noble life with any shadow of such impious attempts at a false glorification; and the authentic materials are abundant enough to take away all temptation on the part of the student to draw from their profane and polluted sources. The only legendary authority from which we have taken anything is the beautiful

collection of popular stories read and loved in Italy to this day, which is called the *Fioretti di San Francesco*—the Little Flowers of St. Francis. The tiny little unbound volume in the worst type and rudest paper, costing a few bajocchi only, from which we have quoted, is in itself evidence enough how these most touching chronicles have kept hold of the heart of the Italian people. This book is not contemporary; it is generally believed to belong in its present form to the first half of the fourteenth century, but has every appearance of having existed under the form of oral legend long before. In quoting from it we have been scrupulous never to build upon its facts as authentic, but simply to take advantage of the fresh and delightful variety of life and circumstance which it throws upon the tale.

It would be unjust not to acknowledge, at the same time, the service rendered to the student by the painstaking labours of the Bollandist father who has edited the three contemporary biographies of Francis as they appear in the *Acta Sanctorum*,—collating them with the further information contained in the Annals of the Order, compiled by the learned priest Luke Wadding—and examining every fact and every inference with a calm elaboration, not to say tediousness, of critical judgment which are simply invaluable. Father Suysken is not so interesting as Celano, as Leo and his brothers, or the poetic and eloquent Bonaventura, but his careful discussion over and over of every incident, his elaborate comparisons and examinations of date and evidence, are of the highest importance, and cannot be over-estimated.

Of modern works on the subject, the chief referred

to have been the Life of Francis of Assisi, by Dr. Karl Hase, a painstaking and valuable volume: and Ozanam's eloquent sketches, *Les Poëtes Franciscains.*

This is perhaps scarcely the place in which to render private acknowledgments, but the writer cannot end this introductory note without offering her thanks, and more than thanks, to the indefatigable and kindest friend who has aided her ignorance in many a tedious hour's reading and weary night's work—who even now will not wish to be named—but to whom she owes the deepest gratitude.

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FRANCIS OF ASSISI.

CHAPTER I.

HIS EARLY DAYS.

TOWARDS the end of the twelfth century, in the year 1182, Francis Bernardone, the son of Pietro Bernardone and Madonna Pica his wife, was born in the little town of Assisi, which has since become illustrious through his name and memory. The vale of Umbria, the very heart and centre of Italy, with its rich fields and woods and pleasant streams—a garden of Eden situated between two seas, yet, unconscious of either, shut in by hills which stretch upward through vineyards and olive-gardens to the dark foliage of the oak and fir on the crest of Apennine—lay at the feet of the little mountain borough, then quite undistinguished among the other fierce little independent towns that shone on the neighbouring slopes within sight of its watch-towers. It is difficult to form even an imagination of Assisi apart from the great man who has been its glory for six centuries, and has made of it at once a monument and a shrine. But yet it existed, with less difference than it is easy to conceive, walled and defended on its sunny height, a warlike municipality, no doubt ready to defy Perugia opposite,

or Foligno; prepared to ring its bells in loud alarum, and pour forth its excited burghers, on the smallest provocation, for the defence of those narrow streets and lofty houses, which to them were both home and country. No larger patriotism existed at the time in Italy. The city, not the country, was the object of every man's devotion. The world within those walls was big enough for public spirit and enterprise, for faction and party, for making of war without and many a tumult within. The walls exist still, though the gates are guarded only by the homely officers of the Dogana; and all the curious precautions of the past, like the intricacies of an old-fashioned lock, are innocently open to the eyes of the peaceable traveller. But the narrow lofty streets into which, when any passing commotion arises, the people throng out like bees, while those who remain at home scream at each other from the high windows just as they might have done when the tocsin was sounding, and the great Cathedral bells giving forth warning notes of danger, remain curiously unchanged. Probably the very shops—dark caverns, with one vast door giving all the light that can penetrate even from Italian skies to the ground floor of a seven or eight storied building deep down in the depths of a narrow lane—look very much like that shop to which Messer Pietro came home from his journey into France, and where he first heard that his son was born. But such a man as Pietro Bernardone was of a very different class from the shopkeepers of the nineteenth century. To seek the costly stuffs which he sold to his rich townsfolk and to the great feudal lords and their households, he had to travel far, and to accumulate many experiences; and in a commonwealth so limited, the position of the substantial citizen was one of no

small importance. The chances were that he knew a great deal more, and possessed a more real influence, than the noble in his palace, poor and proud, who could do little to further the enterprises of the vigorous, tumultuous community. And the merchant's son was born to a position more distinct and assured, if less elevated, than that of the young count or penniless chevalier.

Pietro was in France when his son was born, and the mother, in his absence, called the boy Giovanni; but when the merchant returned, and unpacked his bales, and had time to look at his baby, he changed its name to that of Francesco, for love, it is said, of the land he had just quitted. Probably he had made some specially good bargain or found some fortunate invention on the other side of the Alps, which inspired him with gratitude, and it was in this quaint manner that he expressed it. So far as the indications of his character that remain to us show, he must have been a man of considerable individuality, fond of money, yet never grudging its expenditure in a creditable way. He could be liberal even, it is apparent, on occasions, and only closed his hand fast upon his purse-strings when the manner of dispensing his money displeased him. He loved honour and importance better than gold; but he loved his gold better than to let it be squandered at the will of a foolish boy gone mad with fanatical zeal and over-religiousness. We are not told if Francis was his eldest son, though, from the important position he seems to have assumed in the household, it is most probable that he was so. The boy would seem to have been educated like others of his class. He learnt a little Latin from the priests of San Giorgio, enough to give him in after-years the profound and almost

superstitious respect of the partially educated for everything that was written; while at the same time a certain practical sense that literature was not always to the profit or improvement of its possessor led him almost to discourage the pursuit of it among his followers. But the knowledge of which he seems to have been most proud, which was probably a distinction among his young companions, was that of the French language, for which, during all the earlier part of his life, Francis retained a touching partiality. He spoke it imperfectly; but yet it was his choice to speak it, and he seems to have had recourse to it at various important moments of his life.

The language thus dear to him was not, however, pure French, but Provençal, which was in those days the special language of poetry, carried everywhere by the wandering Troubadours, who diffused the love of song and the mingled gaiety and sentiment of their own picturesque-fantastic life wherever they went. Nowhere had their influence produced a greater enthusiasm than in the congenial air of Italy; and never was there young citizen more ready to embrace all the delights of youth than Francesco Bernardone. He grew up, not disdainful of the shop or the merchandise which were habitual to his race, but fond of pleasure and finery, and everything that makes life sweet. His imagination would seem to have been captivated by the foreign minstrels and their graceful ways. He had plenty of money, plenty of freedom, evidently a fine voice and the most genial and gay temperament. When one of the gay societies called Corti, copied from the Provençal model, was formed in Assisi, he was among its earliest members. It was their custom to roam about the streets, singing the romantic ballads

and soft serenades which they derived from their teachers; and the young Francesco was always foremost among the performers. Some of his biographers, with that curious instinct common to religious writers in all ages, which throws double shades of darkness on the beginning of a saint's career, in order to bring out more brightly the lights of the after-picture, have attributed a certain licence and wantonness to the young man in his secular state; but, so far as we can make out, without the least warrant for so doing. He was fond of society, of fine clothes and merry entertainments, of music and song, and pleasure generally; but these are not sins, and, among all the details that are given to us, we find no record of any disgraceful or painful episode. He was magnificent in the feasts over which he presided, but he was also lavish in his charities, and his inclination towards everything that was beautiful and costly was accompanied by a general bountifulness not always consistent with the fine tastes of the connoisseur.

"He is like the son of a prince, not like our son," Pietro and his wife said to each other, with the fond, wondering pride of humdrum people, scarcely able to understand how so dazzling a figure should come out of their humble house. But when the neighbours, less fond, took up the words and threw them back with that changed meaning which makes so great a difference in the aspect of the simplest saying, the mother was moved by love of her boy to an enigmatical speech, which afterwards counted as a prophecy—"If he lives like the son of a prince now, he shall hereafter be a child of God," she said, defending her prodigal; and it is evident that the pair did nothing to stop their son in his gay career, but kept his bountiful hand supplied, and grudged neither his splendour

nor his charities. Whatever gaiety might be afloat among the young men of Assisi, Francis was the ringleader; to him, as to the best instructed in such matters, was left the ordering of the revels, and of the costly suppers that followed. The brief, formal narratives of his historians, carefully as all humanity has been strained out of them, and anxious as the writers are to describe a saint and not a man, still cannot quite conceal from us that happy, genial figure. His eyes dancing with life and gay spirits, his hand and his heart open as the day, he went singing about the steep Assisi streets at the head of his young comrades, through those glorious nights of Italy; yet was ever ready to pause if some poor creature thrust out a supplicating hand by the wayside, with that sweet compunction of superior happiness which is so beautiful in youth. No beggar ever asked from him in vain; and when we remember what Italian beggars are now, and what they must have been then, it is very evident that Pietro's son cannot have lacked for anything, and that the scarsella or pouch attached to his girdle must have been almost as well supplied as Fortunatus's purse.

But, amid all his gaiety, another thread of life was already visible by glimpses, weaving itself into the young man's joyous days; a certain fanciful, humourous, half-pathetic sense of the unreality of existence showed itself by times amid his merrymaking. As one instance of this, he would sometimes have the fine clothes, in which he delighted, lined with the coarsest stuff that could be procured, as if in mockery of his own daintiness. And there is an incident recorded of him at this period, which gives the most curious glimpse into his twofold life. He was standing one day in the market-place, selling, according to the fashion of the time, cloth and velvet and fine embroideries, the wares

his father dealt in. Such a figure—a young man, himself so splendid, so lavish, and so graceful—is very hard to realize in that booth in the Piazza among all those wrangling rustic customers; but Francesco was neither above nor before his age. He was too busy to attend to a beggar, who appealed to him no doubt with some pitiful plaint, in the midst of his work; but a moment after, probably when the bargain was made. and his mind free, he bethought himself, with deep compunction, of the man whom he had permitted to stray away unrelieved. No sooner had this thought entered his mind than he abandoned his stall and goods, and rushed after the beggar through the windings of the crowd. When he had bestowed his alms, no doubt doubled, Francis returned thoughtfully to his merchandise, and "made a solemn promise to God that from that day forth he would never refuse an alms to any who should ask it of him, for the love of God." But no doubt that same night, or shortly after, he would spend a great deal more upon a supper to his friends. Such was the young man's nature, answering to every appeal, responsive as the leaves are to the breeze, or the flowers to the sun—all gladness and gay freedom above, *Liberalis et hilaris*, as say his Three Companions; yet possessed by a persistent feeling, for which he could scarcely account to himself, of the sadder depths of existence, the tragic and awful elements that lay below.

Francis, however, it is evident, was no mere reveller, even during this butterfly period of his life. That he must have fought for his city, and been among the most energetic of its defenders, is apparent from the fact that he lay for a whole year in prison at Perugia, having been taken captive in a war between Assisi and that city. Whether this was a simple broil

between the armed neighbours, or whether some higher principle was involved, we are left in ignorance, the chroniclers being concerned only with the demeanour of their hero in this gloomy interruption of his fortunate life. It is recorded of him that while all his comrades were sunk in the deepest despondency, he alone kept his courage up, and retained his cheerfulness; and that when some quarrel among themselves arose, and a certain individual of the party was avoided by the rest, on account of some real or fancied crime against his comrades, Francis alone declined to aggravate the pains of the prison by social excommunication of one of his fellow-sufferers. His courtesy and sweetness of temper had already begun to be remarked among his townsfolk, and a vague sense of something to come, which was greater than his present state, stirred even the gloom and depression of the dungeon at Perugia. When his companions there, seeing his cheerful looks, upbraided him with callousness and indifference, he is said to have answered them, with a certain youthful magniloquence. "What have you to say to me?" he cried, no doubt worn out with their melancholy and repining, and contempt of his own courageous lightheartedness: "the time will come when the world shall adore me." The chances are, however, that these words, which his biographers seize upon eagerly as a prophecy of his future canonization, only came to the mind of his old comrades after that canonization had been accomplished; for they are strangely unlike the always humble, friendly, and sympathetic soul of the future saint.

This first epoch of his life, with all its joyousness and freedom, lasted till he was twenty-five. He had full time to make himself known and noted in the little town, where every man had known his neighbour from

the cradle; and the character of the young exquisite, the gay Trovatore, the lavish, good-hearted, extravagant youth whose voice rang through the streets by night, and whose fine clothes and sunny looks dazzled his townsfolk by day, was as well known among them as that of any prince among his people. He was "the flower of youth" in Assisi, where, even while they shook their heads over his pranks, the elder people prophesied that something more than the common fate would come of Pietro's son. Through all these years of pleasure-making, he never found time for a rough word, but was courteous to all, and full of charity and toleration. When any evil suggestions were made to him, or temptations to sin held out by any of his comrades, we are told that he made little reply. He rejected the proposal, but he did not preach nor place himself on any platform of superior virtue; and this unusual union of purity and charity impressed, as was natural, the popular mind, so sensible everywhere, and especially in Italy, to the influence of courtesy and gracious manners.

When he had reached the age of twenty-five, Francis fell ill. What his malady was, or whether it was of long duration, we are not informed; but it was serious enough to change the current of his thoughts, and to become the turning-point of his life. His earliest biographer, Thomas of Celano, here pauses in his narrative, and affords us a glimpse of the young man at this important moment, in the weakness of his convalescence. On one of the earliest days of his recovery, he dragged himself, panting and wearied with the exertion, to the door of the house in which he was living, and gazed out curiously upon the well-known scene. Most likely, long shut up in a sick chamber, he had been longing for a sight of that wonderful landscape

which might well charm even eyes and hearts which were not acquainted, as Francis was, with every clump of foliage on every hill. With wistful, serious eyes which had looked death in the face, he looked down upon the fertile valley at his feet; but its beauty and sweetness, says the chronicler, delighted him no longer. "Henceforward he held that in contempt which he had hitherto held in admiration and love," Brother Thomas adds, with a determination to represent his entire life as changed in his conversion, which is as far from the truth, as no doubt the simple fact he records is consistent with it. Francis crept back to his chair with the depression which accompanies weakness, and the feeling that his illness had revealed mysteries to him, which made the simple enjoyment of that lovely landscape henceforward an impossibility. He threw himself down with that impatient longing in his heart after the best and highest, and disdain of his own past and its frivolities, which so serious a pause in a young life often brings. He could not be again simply what he had been—a merchant and citizen laying up treasure which moth and rust could corrupt, and throwing his whole strength into pleasures which might be lost to him in a moment. But as yet no light as to what he was to do seems to have fallen on his path. The impression upon his mind even would not seem to have been strictly religious. His real vocation had not occurred to him; but only a sense of the deeper seriousness, importance, and use of life, blended with something of that ambition which belongs to manhood in its maturer form.

And it was entirely natural, though so curiously out of accordance with the life that was so soon to dawn upon him, that the first thought of Francis after this

crisis was to make himself a soldier. It was still the age of chivalry, when every armed man was bound to redress wrongs and succour weakness, at least in theory; and, perhaps, this great ideal may have charmed the young man's dreamy mind; or, perhaps, contact with the practical in its most violent form was his best remedy in the state of over-consciousness and over-thought into which he had fallen. And in the profession of arms, above all others, there was the chance of doing something which would be worth doing, and leaving his mark on the world, as well as of finding personal advancement, honour, and glory—matters to which his mind was not yet by any means indifferent. Opportunity was never wanting in that age for any young soldier of fortune, and at this moment, we are told, a certain noble citizen of Assisi was preparing a band to march into Apulia, to sustain the pretensions to the kingdom of Sicily of Gauthier de Brienne, a personage described by Bonaventura as "a certain count of great magnificence and liberality." This enterprise fired the mind of Francis. It held out before him a good cause—the cause of a rightful heir—and at the same time unlimited hopes of advancement, and power of doing service to his generation. This merely external aspect of the question was enough to charm a young man still in the age to which adventure is sweet, and bent upon somehow making more of his life than he could do in the shop and market-place of Assisi. And other arguments still more potent were not wanting. While the project was shaping in his mind, he went out one day in the delight of returning health, dressed in a new suit of the handsome clothes for which he had a carnal inclination—glad no doubt to put them on, and feel himself free of the bright world again after his long confinement indoors. On the way he met

"a certain soldier of honour and courage, but poor and vilely clad." The charity which was habitual to him, and the feeling of brotherhood towards an old man-at-arms, which his new-born military ardour naturally inspired, moved him to sudden enthusiasm. He took off his fine clothes and gave them to the poor old warrior, with effusive sympathy and kindness. "Thus he at once fulfilled two offices of pity," says Bonaventura, "by covering the shame of a noble cavalier and relieving a poor man's penury."

This charitable deed was rewarded on the very next night by a dream of glory. Before Francis, while he slept, there rose a goodly palace, with an armoury filled with every kind of weapon, each of which was marked by the sign of the cross; and flags and symbols of military triumph were hung about the walls. While he admired and wondered within himself for whom this place was prepared, he heard a voice, which announced to him that it was for himself and his soldiers. Francis rose, light-hearted and full of the warmest confidence of faith. That he should be thus divinely directed was no wonder to him, nor would it have been to any man of his age. It seemed natural, on the contrary, that God should interfere—that divine direction should be given; more natural a great deal than that the world should be left to its own guidance. Francis, for his part, had no longer any difficulty; his course was clear before him. He immediately provided himself with a horse and armour, and set out joyfully on the path which God had thus distinctly indicated. His aspect was so radiant that he was questioned on all sides what good thing had happened to him. "I shall yet be a great prince," he replied, in his sanguine delight, and so left Assisi with the most brilliant hopes in his heart. It would

not appear that his family made any opposition to this change of career. Probably they, like himself, had faith enough in the brilliant social qualities of Francis, and in his energetic and straightforward character, to feel that he could not fail of finding a place for himself in the ranks of an army of adventurers.

The young Cavalier went as far as Spoleto, on his way to the South; but, when he reached that town, fell ill once more, most probably with a relapse of the intermittent fever which pursued him more or less all his life, and which haunts like a ghost the fairest parts of Italy. While he lay thus one night, no doubt chafing over the delay, in the feverish successions of heat and cold, half asleep, half stupefied, he suddenly heard a voice, which questioned him. "Francesco," said the unseen speaker, "which can do the most good—the master or the servant?" "The master," he answered, without apparently any alarm at this strange nocturnal examination. "Why then," continued the voice, "do you leave the master for the servant, and the prince for the follower?" As undoubting as Samuel or Saul of Tarsus, the young Assisan immediately asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "Return to thy country," was the answer, "and there it will be told thee what to do; for thou hast mistaken the meaning, and wrongly interpreted the vision vouchsafed to thee by God." For all the rest of the night Francis, startled out of the dreamy stupor of his weakness, lay awake pondering this communication. The reader will remark in it the curious adoption of scriptural precedent, which is so common in mediæval legend, as if God in such a matter must needs repeat Himself. Like Paul, Francis was to be kept in suspense till he should reach his home. There is no record afforded us of the

sharp pang it must have given to the young man thus to relinquish his hopes and ambition. The historian in those days did not pause to analyse, or even to realize, the feelings of his hero; but it can scarcely be supposed that such a sudden return, after so proud and joyful a setting out, done in the eyes of the whole city, could be other than a bitter mortification to the young man who loved the sympathy of his kind, and had been used to it from his cradle. Nevertheless, as soon as morning came, he mounted his horse and turned back on the way to Assisi with the same readiness and confidence, his biographer tells us, that marked his setting out. To ride up that stony causeway, and go in at the gate, and make his way to his father's door, amid the flutter of wondering salutations, and all the comments of the neighbours, must have been the hardest passage that as yet had occurred in his life. But whatever his feelings were, he hid them in his own breast, and returned to the shop and all his humbler duties without complaint or hesitation—though it is impossible to believe without many a mortifying criticism and jibe which it would be hard to bear.

This curious episode was followed by a lingering interval of suspense and mental disturbance. His old habits were resumed, but not with his old energy. He even went back languidly and fitfully to his old amusements, with now and then a wild impulse of gaiety, and now a sudden disgust with all his pursuits. On one such occasion, we are told, he had been, as in his gayer days, the king of the feast among his usual companions. When the supper was over, the party sallied out as usual, Cecco the leader and head of all, to sing their songs about the streets, doubtless with eyes open for any chance of frolic

which might occur. The noise and laughter were at their loudest, when they plunged down the dark staircase, and issued forth into the soft voluptuous Umbrian night. When he came out into that sweet air, into the serene silence, a sudden hush fell upon the master of the revels. He stood still suddenly, abstracted from these noisy human delights by the sight of heaven and the touch of nature. "What ails you, Francesco?" cried the boisterous youths about him, amazed at this pause and change. "Are you thinking of a wife?" said some bold jester. "Yes," answered the dreamer, "of a wife more noble, more beautiful, more rich, than anything your imagination can conceive." It was Religion he meant, say some; or Poverty, as others think; his historians gazing wistfully, like his comrades, at the young reveller thus suddenly stopping short in the midst of the mirth, are almost as much puzzled as they were. We doubt much whether it was either Religion or Poverty. What arrested him was, no doubt, that startled sense of incongruity which strikes the finer-toned and more sensitive mind when thus suddenly, in the midst of human din, brought face to face with that everlasting contrast—the blue sky overhead so profound and serene, the dark shadow of those high roofs which framed it in, and which hid so many sufferings and sorrows—the heaven above so calm and distant, and the aching, moaning earth below. Which of us has not felt some passing prick of that contrast in the midst of the frivolities of life? It struck Francis like a sudden arrow while thus he stood, at the crisis of his being, waiting to know God's pleasure, and struggling with the beginning of his fate.

Whether this was the last of his revels we are not told—though there is something in such a pause of

self-disgust and heart-sickness which might well mark the moment at which he threw aside pleasures so unsatisfactory and vain—nor is it apparent how long the interval was before he found his true vocation. He was drawn gradually, as by the setting in of a tide, towards that life of utter self-abnegation which was preparing for him. In the first place, it would seem to have been by his natural charity that he was attracted towards that narrow path. Amid all his lavish gifts to others, there had been one class of the miserable whom Francis, with his love of everything beautiful, had constantly avoided and shrunk from. These were the lepers—mysterious sufferers, whose awful typical malady has always been regarded with double horror wherever it has been known, and who were then to be seen about the Italian plains, abject and abandoned, as they once were in Judæa. One day, while he was riding across the valley, Francis met one of these wretched beings. His heart was very soft at the moment, and full of an emotion which he himself scarcely understood. A new principle of life was growing within him, turning him from all the indulgences of the past, and, no doubt, already suggesting a hundred sacrifices. "Remembering that if he would be a soldier of Christ he must first overcome himself," says Bonaventura, "he dismounted from his horse, and went to meet the leper, that he might embrace him; and when the poor man stretched out his hand for alms, he kissed it and filled it with money." The reader who is acquainted with the legends of the saints will expect what follows. When Francis, having gone on his way, looked back along the level road, and over the open valley, there was no trace of any leper far or near. It was the same leper whom Elizabeth of Hungary put in her own

bed after she had filled all the other chambers in her palace with the suffering poor: it was He who said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

Perhaps it was the glow of feeling which followed this solemn adventure, perhaps only (and this, which is not problematical, is the safest reason to give) the determination to overcome himself, which is the first duty of the Christian knight, that moved him to the last extremity of self-devotion known to the mediæval world. He began to visit the lazar-houses, which he had hitherto held in horror, not only bestowing alms, but personal services of the humblest description, and adding the kiss of human kindness to console the miserable whose touch was dreaded by all the world. While he was still in a state of profound uncertainty, the transition as from one existence to another, he went to Rome, most likely upon his ordinary business, which he would seem to have pursued all through this crisis of the inner life. Nothing can be more significant of the strange confusion and chaos of the young man's mind, his overwhelming sense of some great convulsion about to come, and pathetic doubt as to what he was to do, or how to shape his existence, than the wild, half-fantastic narrative of the day he spent in the great Cathedral of St. Peter, the centre of Christianity. A sick heart, with all its feverish sudden impulses, is apparent in all he does. As he wandered about St. Peter's (not, it is unnecessary to say, the great but questionable edifice which now bears that name, but an earlier building), his eye was caught by the poverty of the offerings made at the altars, which were in such strange contrast with the importance of the metropolitan church of Christendom. With impetuous indignation he thrust his

hand into his purse, and drawing it out full of money threw the contents in "at the window," as the Three Companions describe it—probably by the narrow railed-off entrance of some chapel. The offering thus strangely made in youthful heat and impatience, fell with a great noise upon the marble floor, and filled the bystanders with amazement; while Francis, probably half ashamed of his violence, and of the crash of the money on the chapel floor, hurried out to the steps of the church, always dissatisfied, with that ache of discontent gnawing at his heart. The sight he saw there gave another direction to his fitful, troubled thoughts. All round the church-door, on the broad steps, and about the sunny piazza, were groups of beggars asking alms from the faithful as they came and went to their devotions. No doubt the contrast between his own wild ostentation of a moment since and this absolute penury must have struck the sick fancy of the young Assisan. With an impulse like that of Saul when he prophesied among the mystics of Israel, in the excitement of a crisis not unsimilar, Francis threw off his own gay garments and exchanged them for the rags of one of the poorest beggars on the cathedral steps. There could be no more striking indication of the chaos of all his ideas, and the vague jumble of everything before and around him, than the succession of impulses so different and so immediately obeyed. He remained there all day begging among the other wretches who crowded the steps—begging in French, with the most curious adherence to his own identity and his own fancies. Such an incident defies explanation. Across all the difference of the ages it may still be comprehended by those who are conscious what wild and strange suggestions sometimes present themselves

before a mind suddenly disturbed in the confidence of youth, and loosed from the anchors of use and wont; but it is not to be explained in words. This was the way in which he made his visit to Rome remarkable. The chances are he went about his business as skilfully, as shrewdly as ever, and that no one found out, till long after, the strange mad way in which the fire which burned in his heart had expended itself. Probably at this early period the longing of his life to give up everything for Christ had dawned within him—a longing which as yet had taken no form, and was as far removed as possible from any vocation towards conventual life, with its individual poverty, but corporate comfort. Such an impulse never seems to have entered into his mind. To be a monk was never his desire at any time of his existence; but only how to serve Christ most utterly, to give up all for Him, to follow His steps. His day at St. Peter's may probably have given the definite religious turn to his anxious, inquiring, and unsettled soul; but even yet enlightenment as to what he was to do had not been given.

But the joyous, careless days of youth were over, never to return. When he went home after this, the current of his life gradually, imperceptibly, swept into the new channel of piety; not charity and almsgiving alone, but profound thought of the Divine mysteries began to occupy his mind. The sublime life of our Lord, in all its humility and simplicity, and the death which concluded that long sacrifice, seized upon his soul, as sometimes the influence of a living leader suddenly seizes a young imagination. No "count of great magnificence and liberality," no royal young Pretender ready to reward his adherents with gifts and honours, but the Lord of all sorrow and sacrifice,

the Redeemer of all bonds and slavery, gradually grew manifest to the dreaming eyes, which were capable of comprehending the Divine generosity, so unspeakable and infinite, of His life on earth. This is the one point which is prominent in the narrative of what is technically called the conversion of Francis. It is not an eager desire for his own salvation which moves him. So far as is apparent, he is not at all troubled about his salvation, nor has his mind been roused to any definite thought on the subject. It is that his own nature, so generous and lavish, is struck and captivated by the wonder of Christ's sublime generosity. He not only adores, but he admires, with an ecstasy of wonder and human approbation, the character of the Saviour. He weeps over the Passion as if it had happened in his sight, with all that vivid sense of reality which constant custom and over-familiarity are so apt to deaden in our minds. To Francis it was so real that he longed to follow every step literally of that life of lives. As this thought possessed him more and more, he retired into secret places, finding, no doubt, seclusion impossible in his father's house. One of his friends, whose name is not given, but to whom it is evident Francis himself had become the hero to be worshipped and followed, went with him often in his walks, probably, like many another humble follower, unable to understand how his adoring company could hamper or hinder the object of his faithful friendship. When they had reached the cave or thicket of which Francis had made an oratory, the young saint left his friend outside, telling him that he had found a treasure which he kept within; and leaving his devoted companion to guard the entrance. If there was a touch of pious deception in this, it may well be forgiven to the gentle soul, who could not be

discourteous at any price, and yet had a necessity upon him to escape and be alone with his God. Here he would spend hours of rapt devotion, sometimes seeing visions, hearing the voice of Christ himself, but never in words which he could understand. When he came out of his cave, to the delight of the humble sentinel outside, his countenance was so changed, so pale and worn, and marked with the terrors of his conflict, that he could scarcely be recognized. He was walking in darkness, not knowing where to turn or what to do. The old ways were impossible to him, his landmarks removed, his path lost. He could not go back, nor could he yet see any way for himself through the new world which dawned before him. It was his hour in the wilderness; and so far as his friends and neighbours could see, an eclipse had fallen upon the brilliant promise of his youth.

CHAPTER II.

HIS FIRST STRUGGLES.

THIS strange interval of pain and uncertainty could not last for ever, and its crisis came in a manner not less strange. There was in Assisi an old church dedicated to St. Damiano, which had fallen into disrepair. It was one of the lonely places which Francis sought for his devotions. Kneeling in the crumbling old church before an image of the Crucified, the object above all others of his ecstatic adoration, he heard a voice saying to him, "Francis, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go and restore it for me."—"With good-will, Lord," said the eager supplicant. Here was at last an indication of what he ought to do. All that he thought of in his anxious literalness was the little ancient sanctuary with its defaced decorations and mouldering walls; not of the Catholic Church for which Christ died, and which, according to the interpretation given afterwards to the Divine message, he was called upon to reform and restore. There is no notice taken in the chronicle of the curious misinterpretation which in both these cases the young penitent gave to the words which he believed to come from God. And it is not our part, in repeating the touching story of his life, to enforce any secondary lesson; yet a forcible comment might thus be made upon the doubtfulness of all such visions

It is not our intention, either here or elsewhere, to discuss the reality of these communications as matters of fact. Every true revival of religion is unquestionably accompanied by signs which are not trickery, and cannot be entirely the creation of morbid fancy and enthusiasm. At a more fitting point of our narrative we shall be compelled to return to this subject, but in the meantime it is enough to note that no great popular return to the habits of piety has ever been made, from the time of the Apostles, without the occurrence of certain spiritual phenomena which cannot be entirely explained away by any theory. We do not, therefore, attempt to give any judgment as to the nature of those voices which within his own heart or to his bodily ear spoke to Francis; that he himself had the most perfect faith in them there can be no doubt. We would but point out the curious fact that twice over he mistook them, once in his hasty adoption of secular warfare instead of the spiritual conflict that had been indicated to him; and, again, in his literal application of the expression "my house" to the old church in which he knelt; which shows how liable human interpretation would still be to error, even were it in fact and reality directly taught from heaven.

Francis sprang from his knees, too joyful of the task which he supposed had been committed to him to take any time for deliberation; he sought the priest, who held the cure of St. Damiano, and, taking out what money was in his purse, begged that it might be spent in keeping a lamp perpetually burning at the foot of the Crucifix which had given him his commission; then he hastened home with all the mingled energy and anxiety natural to the situation. To have a work at once so important and so congenial thus confided by God himself to His servant's hand must have swelled

his heart with unspeakable exultation; but the work was a great one, demanding more care and thought than anything he had as yet attempted. Whether there arose any questions in the mind of Francis as to the step he was about to take, we are not told; or whether he did it hastily, in the fervour and impatience of his mind, without due consideration of right and wrong. It is probable that the latter was the case, and that, fortified by the command of God, he did not pause to think what would be the opinion of his father, who it would appear up to this time had never stinted him in any extravagance. We might add, that he was now a man over twenty-five, had been engaged in his father's business for years, and might naturally be supposed to have some individual power in the matter, and interest in the stock-in-trade. However this may have been, Francis took action with all the impetuosity of his character. He rushed home, selected certain bales of cloth, as many as his horse could carry, from the stores in the shop, and, mounting, hastily rode off to the fair at Foligno with his merchandise. He made the sign of the cross over his goods when he set out, fondly hoping, perhaps, that by thus dedicating them to God he was silencing all objections on the part of men. At Foligno he took his stand in the Mercato, as, no doubt, he was used to do, and sold at once the cloth and the horse which had carried it. The "happy merchant," as Celano and Bonaventura both call him, at this moment of satisfaction yet doubt, returned immediately to Assisi; and the young reader who has not yet outlived that mingled sense of goodness and guilt, that alarmed consciousness that parental disapprobation may possibly follow an action which is felt to be virtuous in itself, will be able to realize the feelings of Francis as

he walked silently home, or perhaps found a corner in which he could sit abstracted, in some waggon full of pleasure-loving townsfolk who were returning, like himself, from the fair at Foligno.

As soon as he reached Assisi, he hastened to St. Damiano, and, entering "with fear and reverence," offered to the priest the money which he had thus doubtfully acquired, begging at the same time permission to remain with him. By this time fear must have got the better of confidence, and the young man must have felt that it was safer not to return for the moment to his father's house. The offering, so much greater than under any other circumstances he could have given, and the story which no doubt the Curato of St. Damian's succeeded in eliciting from his visitor, filled the priest with alarm and perplexity. He was very willing to take Francis in, and give him shelter; but he was afraid to receive the money, which might embroil him with the young man's father, and lead to greater mischief still. Poor Francis, weary, discouraged, and sick at heart, feeling himself rebuffed in the very spot where at least he had made sure of sympathy, took the purse which the priest declined, and, in his passionate disappointment, tossed it down into the corner of a built-up window, there to lie among the dust and rubbish which were as valueless as it had proved to be. Such a sudden check must have plunged him suddenly back on himself, and left him a prey to all the doubts and terrors which had been staved off by the thought that he was doing God service. The priest, whose honesty and good-feeling had thus triumphed over the temptation to which, above all, priests were susceptible—the chance of restoring and re-beautifying his church—received the disturbed and downcast young man as his

guest, though he rejected his gifts; and there Francis remained, for some days, having, it would seem, lost heart and courage, afraid to face his father, and too sick at heart to make any attempt to restore the money, or set himself right.

Old Bernadone soon found out where his son was. He had been much enraged, as was natural, by the exploit at Foligno, and evidently did not allow any right on the part of his son to dispose of his goods. Pietro's feelings on the occasion seem to have been very much the same as those with which an incensed father of the present time might batter at the gates of a convent in which he believed his child to be illegally shut up. He gathered his neighbours together and made a raid upon St. Damiano to recover his money and his son. Francis, however, shrank from the meeting. The noise and threats of the crowd which accompanied his father, the prospect of a violent scene, and much mortification to his own pride, are scarcely enough to account for his sudden cowardice. But no doubt these were heightened by his own sense of indiscretion akin to guilt, and the good Curato's desire to avoid a public scandal. He took refuge in a dark cellar, where he lived miserably in hiding for a whole month, the earlier biographers say, though Bonaventura restricts the term to a few days. He stayed there long enough, at all events, to reach to the very depths, and in utter self-abasement to recover his natural courage. When he had at last made up his mind that the difficulty must be faced, and could not be escaped in this miserable way, he came out of his voluntary dungeon. Pale and worn by his seclusion, the poor fare with which he had been scantily supplied, the absence of light and comfort, and the exhaustion of unceasing prayer, he left St. Damiano a

very different figure from that of the "Felix mercator," the happy and eager servant of Christ, who had carried his money and his heart to God's house so short a time before.

When he appeared in the streets, and it was perceived who he was, a popular tumult arose. The townsfolk, among whom he had been so great a favourite, crowded round him with threats and insults. They called him mad, and stoned him, and followed him with shouts of malice and derision. It must have been a hard moment for Francis, whose tender soul was deeply penetrated with that love of love which belongs more or less to every generous nature. Here was no love, none of the admiration and homage of the past, but abuse and contempt, and something like hatred. He said not a word of remonstrance or complaint, made no resistance, accepted the bitter welcome, and held on his way as best he could, with such feelings as may be conceived. The tumult was so great that by and by it came to the ears of Pietro in his dark shop, at whose heart no doubt was burning that madness which is wrought by rage against those we love. This was the son whom he had declared in proud pretence of reproof to be more like the son of a prince than of a plain man like himself—the accomplished, cherished, bright-faced boy, who had been the pride of his house and the delight of Assisi. And now, such was the maddening downfall brought about by his own folly, that he was being hooted about those very streets which had once hailed him with universal smiles and welcome. It would be hard to give nothing but blame to poor Pietro. He rushed out from his shop, mad with rage and shame, and a hundred bitter feelings, and falling upon Francis with all the fury of outraged

love and pride, drove him home with blows and curses to the house in which he was born. A miserable house no doubt at that moment; for there was his mother, who was of softer nature, and whose heart melted over her boy. And they had all been so proud of him! They shut him up in a dark prison, say the historians, with that curious absolutism of authority which parents seem to have possessed in those days. Here he was bound as if he had been a criminal, and thus incapable of escape, had all the vials of paternal wrath poured on his head. It was the moment in which the father could avenge himself, having everything in his power, and he seems to have taken the fullest advantage of the privilege.

There came a day, however, on which Pietro was compelled to go out for the transaction of his business, and Madonna Pica was left alone. She was Francis's mother, which was something, and she was evidently of a milder nature than her obdurate husband. She went to her boy in his prison and spoke gently to him. Most probably, the explanations which the father would not listen to were given to her; but, at all events, her heart yearned over her son, and she loosed his chains and let him go. Though his departure was hastened not by malice but by fear and love, still it was the young man's expulsion from his home. He went back to St. Damiano without a word of complaint, having thus had the bonds of nature snapt from him one by one. Henceforward there was no choice for him, or way of escape had he wished it. The little presbytery, the poor priest, the old church falling to ruin—such was the only friend and refuge left to him in the world.

When Pietro returned and found his prisoner gone, his wrath against his wife was great, and he was not

softened towards his son, but pursued him with unwavering virulence. The next step in this painful struggle was an appeal by the angry father to the rulers of the city, requiring of them to recover his money which his son had appropriated. Francis by this time seems to have recovered his courage. There is something in undue violence which does much to weaken penitence, and even, if that be possible, to neutralize the most just ground of complaint. The young man had repented, but had been punished bitterly, and at last, though he said no word of answering wrath, his spirit was roused He replied to the summons of the magistrates that he was now a servant of God, and independent of their jurisdiction—a statement which sounds strangely to modern ears, but was quite in accordance with the spirit of the time, though, indeed, it could scarcely be of any legal weight, as Francis was not in orders. The magistrates, however, touched by his sufferings and constancy, refused to proceed further against him, and Pietro, evidently remorseless in his pursuit of the son who had so disappointed all his hopes, had recourse to the bishop as the final judge. "I will come willingly to the bishop, who is the father and lord of souls," said Francis; and accordingly in the episcopal palace he met, so far as history informs us, for the last time, his unyielding father.

By this time, of course, his story must have been well known, and public opinion no doubt had begun to turn against the harsh Pietro, who demanded not only the restoration of his money, but a public renunciation of all claim to any share of the family inheritance from his once favourite boy. The bishop, who no doubt beheld in Francis a brand plucked from the burning,

and felt for him that special tenderness with which the heart of a good priest regards a convert, received him most kindly, and made him a sensible and judicious address. He exhorted him to restore the money (which all this time, say some, had been lying neglected, like the dross it was, on the old window-ledge at St. Damiano, among the rubbish—though others tell us, with more show of reason, that the Curato had put it carefully by to be in readiness when claimed). "Restore it to him, if you would serve God," said the bishop; "for whatever is acquired by unjust means God will have none of it; it cannot be employed in the work of the Church, and by retaining it you cause your father to sin. Therefore, my son, have faith in God, and act like a man. Be not afraid; for He will help you, and give you all that is necessary for the work of His Church."

These words soothed and encouraged the young penitent; but there was something in the relentless character of the persecution to which he had been subjected which evidently had roused the indignation and almost contempt of Francis. The same father who pursued him so cruelly, exacting a renunciation of every natural right, had grudged him no extravagance of outlay in his days of vanity, and had been ostentatiously proud of his popularity, his splendour, and even his youthful follies. Only now, when his pride was touched, had rancour taken the place of love. "Not only the money," cried Francis, in the vehemence of outraged nature, "but everything that can be called his, even the clothes he has given me, I will restore." And throwing off the gay garments, which no doubt were soiled and frayed with his imprisonment and misery, he piled them in a heap before the astonished assembly, placing the money on the

top of all. Underneath his fine clothes he had been wearing, unknown to any one, a hair shirt, that instrument of torture so dear to the mediæval mind, clothed with which he now stood, inspired by pain and sudden passion, in the midst of the eager crowd. A pale ghost, worn with fasting and mortification, yet burning with all the vigour of youthful energy and vehemence, he turned to the bystanders, half naked, yet delivered by his passion from all sensitiveness or shame. "Bear witness all present," he cried, "up to this time I have called Pietro Bernardone father, but now I am the servant of God. I have restored to him the money which he sought with so much fury, and even the clothes I have had from him; and henceforward I will say only, 'My Father which art in heaven,' —no more my father Pietro Bernardone." At such a moment there can be little question on which side were the sympathies of the bystanders. The bishop took the young man into his arms, tenderly throwing over him his own pallium or episcopal mantle. And a scene so strange and touching moved every heart. The father, meanwhile, on his side equally indignant and full of bitterness, collected the money and the clothes with such feelings as may be imagined, and went out, carrying the remains of the son who was henceforward dead to him. How poor Pica, in her solitude, must have wept over those last tokens of her boy! She must have seen him a hundred times after treading the stony streets with bare feet, braving every anguish of poverty; but he had ceased to be hers from that terrible day. He was the child of God, as she had herself all unconsciously predicted; his quips and jests, the gay Provençal songs he loved, his untimely exits and entrances, all the tumult of youth which a mother reproves and exults in, were over for

ever. No doubt the hard old merchant, among his bales, felt it too, and perhaps had a yearning at his heart which he would not confess, when Fra Francesco went by. But the paternal love had cast him forth, and another father had received him; the place that had known him was to know him no more.

When Francis was thus left "naked," as says his biographer, "of every earthly thing," but strengthened by the bishop's blessing, and clothed with the rough frock of a poor labourer, which had been hastily obtained for him, there are two different accounts given of his proceedings. According to the Three Companions he returned at once to St. Damiano; but Celano and Bonaventura both agree in describing a temporary pause and break in his existence, such as appears very natural after so supreme a crisis. He went out confused and shaken by so many emotions, and hid himself in the wintry woods, in that excited state which makes the body well-nigh impervious to external influences. There was snow on the ground, they tell us, and winter does not jest upon the slopes of Apennine, from which blows the bitter Tramontana, curdling the blood in Tuscan veins. But as he wandered, not knowing where he went, the pilgrim lifted his voice and sang. In the heart of Italy, through the crackling leafless woods, with nothing upon him but his hair shirt covered with a peasant's frock, the visionary went singing God's praises in the gay tongue of France. What reason there was, or whether there was any reason, for this preference, no one can tell. It was probably one of those simple caprices by which a great soul now and then makes manifest its nearness, in its greatness, to a child. His own sonorous and stately language would have seemed the fitter for such a purpose, or if not that, at least the Latin—lan-

guage of sacred tradition and Catholic breadth, in which over the whole world—with a grand sentiment which we are too apt to forget in our care for literal understanding—the praises of God were being sung; but to Francis, the French, although imperfectly known, the language of song, with which all his early delights were associated, was still the sweetest. It is said that he encountered robbers in the wood, who, startled by the foreign singing, and disappointed by the absolute poverty of the wayfarer, threw him into a ditch among the snow; at which further hardship he rejoiced, praising God with yet louder and louder voice. He then found refuge in a monastery, where for some time he laboured in the kitchen, doing the humblest offices. He stayed here till his one garment wore out, and he was compelled to make a journey to the city of Gubbio to obtain another tunic from an old friend. After this follows an indefinite period of wandering, we are not told how long, during which he gave himself up to the nursing of lepers, and entire subjection of his own will and carnal inclination in all things.

When he had gained complete mastery of himself, and felt that he no longer shrank from anything that had to be done, but rather sought every occupation that had once disgusted him, he felt himself worthy to return to St. Damiano to commence the work which he had never abandoned in heart. This, which he had sinned for—if sin it was—and at least suffered for as if it had been sin, had now to be done without any aid of the filthy lucre which, in his simplicity, he had got for it so cunningly. How far behind him must that life have looked, in which he stood eager in the market-place at Foligno selling the cloth which was not his for the love of God! Francis had passed through

many a strait since then; he had relinquished everything the world could give him for God's service; and now he had God's Church to build, and His work to do, out of nothing—out of the greatness of his heart. If he ever wished for the money which had lain so long on the window-ledge as dust, he never gave vent to the evil thought. He begged stones from the people in the city, promising blessings to those who gave them; he carried them on his shoulders, panting and joyous, to St. Damiano; he built the walls with his own hands, collected the materials, worked, and rejoiced, and prayed with all the contempt of youth for the willing but weary body, which with a certain tender humour he called Brother Ass, sometimes confessing that he was too hard upon the docile, humble flesh which he had conquered. Brother Ass had much to bear in those early days—not only the labour to which he was all unaccustomed, and the hard fare which he did not love, but long hours of prayer superadded, and fasts which he had little strength to support; yet trudged on and did his work, sustained by the buoyant, exuberant vitality of the soul.

The townsfolk would seem to have looked on amazed while this work was progressing. Was this Francesco Bernardone, the first gallant of the city—he who had led the revellers about their streets so often, and ridden through the gates with flashing armour and waving plumes? No one had ever heard a hard word from the gay Cecco[1] in his time of sunshine. Man nor maid could bring up against him anything

[1] Cecco (pronounced Chekko), or Ch·cco (pronounced Kekko), is the universal contraction in Italian for the name Francesco. It appears with the spelling *Cicco* (as the name was not then so familiar to Italian ears) in some of the contemporary legends.

that savoured of discourtesy. He had been the *débonnair François*, as he is called in an old French version of his life, from his boyhood: the courtesy of the heart—the only true politeness—had been his conspicuous quality. When he met the men on the roads who had sometimes applauded, sometimes hooted and scorned him, it was still with the smile of ancient kindness on his face. And such a sight could be seen by no human folk without movements of compunction, compassion, and shame. Eventually the hootings died away; a certain silence, and reverence, and awe came over Assisi at the sight. "Many were moved to tears," say the Three Companions; while Francis worked on with cheerful simplicity, begging his materials, stone by stone, singing psalms about the streets of the city, promising the blessing of God to those who helped on God's work, and taking no notice of any lingering cries of "madman" which might still reach his ear. Finally, his patience and unobtrusive cheerfulness so won upon all men, that he was largely assisted, Bonaventura informs us, by the devotion of his fellow-citizens. It is pleasant to know that in this Church of St. Damiano, so associated with the first grand crisis of his life, Francis afterwards established the female branch of his order, and that his friend Chiara, the foundress under him of the order of Poor Clares, and the sister and devout companion of his life, so far as the walls of her cloister would permit, here lived and died.

There remains but one other incident to note in this preface of his life. While he was thus labouring hard at the restoration of St. Damiano, the priest who had been so strangely entangled in his history, and who by this time no doubt had learned to love

the fervent and tender-hearted young man, makes his appearance once more in a kindly fashion that attracts to him all the reader's sympathies. Poor curate of a poor church, his heart was moved within him by the voluntary hardships of his young lodger. Knowing what his life and habits had been, with the intimate knowledge of each other possessed by the inhabitants of a little town, he set himself with friendly wiles to provide for his guest, who worked so hard and took so little thought of his own comfort, some special delicacies of food such as he had been used to. Possibly he saw that Francis at first had hard ado to accustom himself to the poor fare which was all the presbytery could afford him. "For," say the Three Companions, with devout simplicity, "the man of God often confessed afterwards that he had been fond of electuaries (?) and confectionary, and abstained from common food." Curiously, with a kind of infantine softness which brings tears to our eyes, this confession occurs in the very midst of all the hard and stern circumstances of the life of Francis. He who had given up name and fame, father and mother, everything, down to the very clothes he wore, abandoning comfort and praise, and home and friends, for the love of God, had he still a lingering, boyish liking for those wonders of sugar and pastry which still make the Italian confectioner the first in his trade? The good priest, it is evident, thought so, and did what he could to procure for his young companion these homely consolations. It may well have been that Francis himself was shocked by the discovery of this tiny and innocent self-indulgence, which he had not been aware of. In his fervour he almost rebuked the kindness of his fatherly friend :—"You, a priest," he said. "and thus lend yourself to human weakness!"

And in the excitement caused by this sudden discovery he seized a dish or plate from the humble kitchen of the presbytery, and hastening into the town, went from door to door begging from his wondering neighbours such scraps from their table as they would have bestowed upon a beggar. It was madness, fanaticism, folly, no doubt—and yet at that moment, in that age, it was one of the most sublime of lessons. The Assisan housewives who, with an amazement beyond words, gave their alms to that strange petitioner, knew all his story; they knew his daintiness of old, his love of feasting and gaiety, and they knew also for what reason he had renounced them all. When he had collected scraps enough for his meal, the once fastidious Francis went back to the presbytery with the broken crusts upon his plate, to eat with what appetite he might. At first, it is allowed, disgust took possession of him, and he turned from the unpalatable meal—but afterwards going back to it with renewed courage, found that his favourite dainties had never pleased him more. Then he rose up with joyful heart, praising God who had made the bitter sweet, and told his friend, the priest, that henceforward it would be unnecessary to make any provision for him; he had found the means to provide for his bodily wants, without interfering with his work for God.

CHAPTER III.

HIS COMPANIONS.

It was thus, as may be said, by hazard, that Francis established for himself the first principle of his Rule. But no idea of any Rule was then in his mind. When the Church of St. Damiano was finished, he repaired, Bonaventura tells us, another church dedicated to St. Peter, and afterwards the little Church of St. Maria degli Angeli, at the Portiuncula, which became from that time forth his home. This work occupied him for two years; and Bonaventura does not fail to remark on the mystical number of three churches rebuilt before the time came for the disclosure of his real mission to Francis. Up to this time he had lived a curious semi-ecclesiastical life. But he was still a layman, bearing neither tonsure nor orders, and having no right to be considered a clerk. It does not seem to have occurred to him to make himself a monk of any of the existing Rules. He lived alone, free to follow his own counsel, and searching in his own fashion for the way of perfectness. The year of his conversion, as it is called, or of the great crisis we have just described, has been decided to be the year 1206; so that it was now 1208, when, hearing mass one day in the little church he loved, and made his home, something in the Gospel struck him as it had never done before. When

the Mass was over, he begged of the priest to expound it to him. The words which, suddenly rising up out of the dimness of familiarity into all the force of a new and special message, had caught the attention of Francis were these: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Here is what I wanted," he cried suddenly—"here is what I have sought;" and leaving the church, he put off his shoes, threw aside his staff, loosed the leathern girdle from his waist (which no doubt had the scarsella or purse hanging to it, after the fashion of the times), and took a rope—probably the first and meanest thing that came to his hand—to bind his tunic round him. Once more the literalness and simplicity of the man bursts through all conventional compromises. What was to him the difference between the hot Syrian plains and those snow-laden slopes of Apennine? Christ had commanded, and here was a heart only too joyful, too eager, to obey.

Thus once more, half by accident, another distinction of the unformed Order came into being. And what was yet more important, after these two years of silence, and patience, and toil, after all his painful and all his joyful experiences, his mouth was suddenly opened, and his future work revealed to him. The passage is marked in the Roman breviary as the Gospel for the 11th of June, the feast of St. Barnabas; but at such a distance of time, and after so many changes, this is of course but a doubtful indication. He must have heard it often before, taking no thought that in it lay the secret of his life. But, once awakened, Francis paused not a moment. The message, every word of

it, was for him. Out of his little sanctuary at the Portiuncula he sallied forth barefooted, with his brown woollen gown bound by a rope, and his head uncovered, as the traveller in Italy now sees the poor brother of his Order, after six hundred years have come and gone. At a later period it was his choice that the gown should be made with wide and long sleeves, and a great hood, which, when opened out, formed the figure of the cross. It was the common garb of the poorest labourers when the Order began.

We may here quote the sketch of Francis's personal appearance, as given by Thomas de Celano, with a quaint building up of quality after quality, and description on description, which is characteristic of his style. "Oh, how lovely, how splendid, how glorious he appeared in innocence of life, in simplicity of speech, in purity of heart, in divine delight, in fraternal charity, in frequent obedience, in amiable harmony, in angelical aspect!" cries the enthusiastic biographer; but by and by comes down to details less vaguely splendid. "He was of middle stature, rather under than over, with an oval face, and full but low forehead; his eyes dark and clear, his hair thick, his eyebrows straight; a straight and delicate nose, a voice soft yet keen and fiery; close, equal, and white teeth; lips modest yet subtle; a black beard not thickly grown; a thin neck, square shoulders, short arms, thin hands with long fingers, small feet, delicate skin, and little flesh; roughly clothed; sleeping little; his hand ever open in charity." Such was the fashion of the man who set out from the gates of the church at the Portiuncula, in the year 1208, intent upon obeying literally his Lord's command, and all unwitting of the Franciscan Order or its after-grandeur. He was bidden to preach, and he preached, as he would have done anything

else commanded of him, without pause or hesitation; and thus, unaware, set out upon a mission which was to move whole kingdoms and dominate the lives of multitudes of men. Nobody could be less aware of it than the humble Francis. He began his preaching everywhere with the salutation which God, he said, had revealed to him,—"The peace of God be with you;" and from that day gave himself up to the work of extending God's peace among men.

"His words were like fire," says Celano, "penetrating the heart;" and even men and women who loved not peace, moved by his salutation, listened and repented, and were reconciled to God. His first disciple, according to Celano and the Three Companions, was a certain nameless boy of Assisi, of whose history no particulars are given, and who is not mentioned in any after-record. Bonaventura, however, gives this position to a personage of very different calibre, who has found a permanent place by the side of his leader. This was Messer Bernardo di Quintavalle, a well-known citizen, "one of the most noble, rich, and learned of the city." A brief account of his conversion is given by Celano, the Three Companions, and Bonaventura; but there is a fuller narrative in the *Fioretti di San Francesco*, which is so quaintly characteristic of the times, that we quote it at length. Bernardo, who had long known Francis, and watched him through all his vicissitudes, concluded, with good reason, that a man so constant and patient, who had persevered through so many trials, must indeed possess the grace of God; but, with a truly mediæval determination to test the piety which looked so real, adopted the following expedient. The reader will smile at its mingled simplicity and craftiness; but it was thoroughly in keeping with the

manners of the age. He invited Francis to sup with him, and remain all night, in order to apply his test.

"Messer Bernardo," according to the *Fioretti*, "having set his heart on seeing the sanctity of Francesco, had prepared a bed for him in his own chamber, in which a lamp was always burning. But Francesco, to conceal his own holiness, as soon as he had entered the room threw himself upon the bed, and pretended to be asleep. Bernardo, after a little while, lay down in the same manner, and began to snore as one who sleeps profoundly. As soon as Francesco perceived that Bernardo was asleep, he rose from the bed and began to pray, raising his eyes and his hands to heaven, and with great devotion and fervour crying, 'My God, my God!' He remained thus with much weeping until the morning, always repeating, 'My God, my God,' and nothing more. And thus he spoke in contemplation and admiration of the excellence of the Divine Majesty, which had deigned to descend into a perishing world, and had moved the poor Francesco to seek the salvation of his own soul and of others; and therefore illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and considering the great things which God should do by him and by his order, and considering his own insufficiency and weakness, he called upon God and besought Him with His strength and pity, without which human weakness can do nothing, to help and supply and complete that which he could not do of himself. Bernardo, seeing his devotion by the light of the lamp, and considering devoutly the words which he said, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to change his life. When the morning came, he called Francesco, and spoke thus: 'Brother Francesco, my heart is entirely made up to abandon the world and to follow thee in whatsoever thou shalt command me.' Hearing this, Francesco was glad in spirit, and answered thus: 'Messer Bernardo, that which thou sayest is a work so great and difficult that we must ask counsel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and pray Him that it would please Him to show us, above all, His will, and teach us how we can execute it; and therefore let us go to the bishop's palace, where there is a good priest, and have mass said, and there remain in prayer till the hour of tierce, praying God that by three openings of the Missal He would show us the way that pleases Him, that we may

follow it.' Messer Bernardo answered that he would do this gladly.

"Accordingly they went to the Vescovado, heard mass, and remained in prayer till tierce; the priest then, at the prayer of Francesco, took the Missal, and, making over it the sign of the holy cross, opened it three times in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first opening was upon that word which Christ said in the Gospel to the young man who asked of Him the way of perfection—'Go, sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor.' The second opening was upon the words which Christ said to the Apostles when He sent them out to preach—'Take nothing for your journey.' The third opening of the Missal was upon the word which Christ said—'He who will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' Then said Francesco to Bernardo, 'Behold the counsel which Christ gives us: go then and do that which thou hast heard, and blessed be our Lord Jesus Christ, who has deigned to show to us the way of the Gospel.' Bernardo, as soon as he had heard these words, went away and sold that which he had, for he was very rich, and with great gladness distributed everything to the poor, especially widows and orphans. And in everything Francesco faithfully and carefully aided him. A priest called Messer Salvestro, seeing that Francesco gave so much to the poor, being himself very avaricious, said, 'You did not pay me fully for those stones which you bought of me to repair the church, and therefore, now that you have money, pay me.' Then Francesco, wondering at his avarice, but like a true servant of the Gospel not wishing to contend with him, put his hands into the lap of Bernardo, and filling them with money, threw it into the lap of Salvestro, saying, 'If more you will have, more shall be given you.' Salvestro went away with great content, and returned to his house; but in the evening, thinking over what he had done that day, and reproving himself for his avarice, while remembering the fervour of Bernardo, and the sanctity of Francesco, he had a vision from God, the following and two other nights, in which he saw a cross of gold coming out of the mouth of Francesco, the top of which touched the heaven, and the arms stretched from the east to the west. By which vision he was moved to give to God all that he had, and afterwards showed so much holiness and grace in the

Order that he spoke with God as one friend speaks with another."

The whole course of this narrative—the devout spy in his bed watching the secret devotions of the saint—the quaint solemnity in the bishop's chapel—that consultation of God, as of an oracle, through His Word, in which the Scotch Covenanter and the English Methodist, all unconscious, have so closely followed the steps of the mediæval monk, none of the three, apparently, having the slightest consciousness of the pagan origin of the custom—and the equally quaint freedom with which Francis put his hand into the lap of his friend, to pay, with lavish contempt of the dross, the demand of the avaricious priest—has a characteristic air of reality. But we are bound to add, for the sake of Salvestro, that this story of his greed and untimely demand rests chiefly upon the authority of the *Fioretti*. His name and the vision vouchsafed to him are recorded by all the early biographers; but only the Three Companions notice this incident, and that in a milder fashion. "Have you yet enough, Sir priest?" Francis calls to him, in their version, with a certain irrepressible contempt. "I have enough, my brother," he answers meekly, with compunction already rising in his mind. The other historians take no notice of his cupidity; but we have a curious instance of the state of affairs, against which the mission of Francis was a great protest and rebellion, in this anecdote, which shows how the priest, bound to serve the altar, had his hands full of worldly business, and bought and sold, extorting the last penny even from the generous revolutionary who had stepped forth to do what should have been his work. It was thus into a world sadly out of tune, and unconscious how far it had dropped from the true way,

that Francis was born, to be a sign and wonder in the midst of all its self seekings, its fightings, its traffickings, its dominion of the strong, and oppression of the poor.

While Francis and his new disciple were making their way to the church in which, by appeal to the oracles of God, the fate of Bernard was to be decided, they were joined by a canon of the cathedral at Assisi, Pietro de Catanio, a man who, like Bernard, had watched the comings and goings of Francis with a gradually growing curiosity and interest. In all likelihood, they had both known him from his cradle, and been spectators of his early frolics and the wonderful change which had come upon his life. Pietro perhaps, by right of his clerical character, which gave him some experience of the reality or unreality of conversions, did not require such absolute evidence of sanctity as that which Bernard in simple cunning had procured for himself; or perhaps he was a man of greater faith and more insight than the worthy citizen. He joined himself to Francis and his companion on the way, and at once declared his intention to share Bernard's appeal to the Holy Scriptures, and if it was successful to throw in his lot with the poor solitary, who, up to this moment, does not seem to have dreamt of attaching any disciples to himself. Whether the idea of a community of poor servants of God flashed at once on his imagination we cannot tell, or if it was merely that tender natural courtesy in which he was always so strong, which made him accept at once, subject only to the issue of the appeal about to be made, the offer of this new follower. The answer was equally applicable to Bernard and to Pietro; and while Francis returned to his humble hut, the two men of substance and position hastened home, one to sell all his goods

and collect everything which belonged to him, to give to the poor; and the other not only to make that sacrifice, but at the same time to throw up his ecclesiastical rank, to resign his canonry, and put off his dignified clerical garb, in order to put himself under the sway, and to receive with gratitude the miserable dress, of the young fellow who had, half the town thought, grown mad with over-fervour and religious zeal. Even in those days, when religion had so strong a hold upon the popular mind, and received so much more literal an obedience than now, such a decision must have been hard to make; and still more hard must the sacrifice have been to the clerk than to the layman. It is clear that there is very little to tell about Pietro in the records of the Order; no wonders of holiness, no quaint personal incidents, are recorded of him. Probably he was older than any of his companions, and the real history of his life was past; or perhaps the educated and mature priest was more conventional and less picturesque than the other simple mediæval men whom Francis attracted to him; at all events, he leaves but few traces in the popular history. He was vicar of the Order when it grew into an army of men, and one quaint story is told of him after his death; but Pietro himself, as an individual, makes no marked appearance either in legend or history. His early adhesion, however, is a proof how all classes of society and all manner of men were moved by the startling figure of the young reformer coming and going about those familiar ways, teaching not by word, but by life.

Bernard is a character more accordant with the popular fancy, and makes his appearance in various scenes. We will not break the link of the story by introducing here the touching picture of his first

appearance at Bologna, which will find its natural place in the narrative at a later period. But that he was the familiar and trusted friend of Francis throughout all the rest of his life is very apparent. No great office was ever confided to him, probably from his own modest objections to such distinction, but it was he who was selected to tend the sick man found on the wayside, to bear the rudeness of many a humble mission, and to receive his master's latest blessing. He was the first-born, acknowledged by the tender heart of Francis, even when the superior claims of others had raised them above the elder brethren of the Order. It was, according to the *Fioretti*, near a hospital for lepers that the little sorry hut which was the first habitation of the brethren was situated: and it may well be imagined that the sight of the wealthy burgher and the learned canon, dispossessed of all things, inhabiting, along with their leader, that miserable abode, must have been a marvellous lesson to the town which knew them all so well, and all their past history.

Eight days after the reception of these two brethren, and after the wonderful commotion which must have been made in the neighbourhood by the distribution of their goods to the poor—on the eve of St. George—the 22d of April—another citizen of Assisi, called Egidio, set out early in the morning, with eager yet suppressed desires, half fearful of, half longing after the mysterious life into which his townsmen had gone. He went to the church of San Gregorio, which was half-way on the road to the sacred little dwelling, the hut or *Tugurio* in which, sequestered from the world, Francis lived with his companions. When the new-comer had said his morning prayers in the church, he turned with wistful looks towards the lower slopes

which hid the hospital and the hut. By and by two roads branched off on either hand, and Egidio stood troubled, not knowing which to take. His timidity and wistfulness the desire and fear that contended in him, could not be better expressed. Eagerness, however, got the better of doubt, as he stood and contemplated those several paths into the unknown ; and as he stood he prayed that Christ would guide him which of the ways to take. He was still absorbed in this act of anxious devotion when Francis himself made his appearance, coming from the wood in which it was his custom to pray. He was to the new disciple as a messenger from heaven. Egidio threw himself at his feet, and humbly begged to be received into his society for the love of God. Looking at him with kind and penetrating eyes, Francis at once saw the soul in his face. "Carissimo fratello," dearest brother, he said, with that caressing familiarity which then, as now, was so natural to an Italian, "God has given you great grace;" and with these friendly words he led him to the hut. "God has sent us a good brother," he said to Bernard and Pietro as he led the stranger in. "Let us all rejoice in the Lord, and eat together in brotherly love." It is not to be supposed that the new brother thus introduced was a stranger to the other Assisans ; but in all probability he was a man of a totally different class. A French narrative, which we have before us, describes him as living an easy and prosperous life ; but all the indications of the early writers are in favour of his having been a labouring man. He lived by his work, "as he was accustomed always to do," says the *Fioretti*, describing his after-life ; and there is no mention in his case, as in the others, of that selling all and giving to the poor which always attends the

conversion of those who have anything to give up. Francis, indeed, makes trial of his liberality in a totally different way. "When they had eaten," says the simple narrative, "Francis went with this Egidio into Assisi to procure cloth to make him a habit. A poor woman met them by the way, who asked alms from them, for the love of God; and not knowing where to find anything to give her, Francis turned to Egidio with an angelic look ('una faccia angelica'), and said, "For the love of God, carissimo fratello, give your cloak to this poor creature." And Brother Egidio obeyed, with a heart so ready, that Francis seemed to see the alms fly at once to heaven, and Egidio with it, so that he was filled with unspeakable emotion and joy." When Egidio had received the brown gown, the habit of the new Order, Francis took him as his companion on an apostolic journey into the march of Ancona. And here the simple narrative furnishes us with a clue to the gradual progress of the saint, from the unlearned simplicity of his youth into that full development of natural power which made him at length so successful as a preacher. The two brethren went singing along the sunny roads in the sweet early summer, "magnificently praising the Lord of heaven and earth;" and, "as it happened that St. Francis had not yet begun publicly to preach to the people, he went along admonishing and reproving men and women by the way, saying simply, with tenderness, 'Love and serve God, and do worthy penance for your sins;' and Brother Egidio said, 'Do what my spiritual father says to you, because what he says is the best.'"

How charming, how simple, is this childlike strophe and antistrophe! The two thus answered to each other, while the villagers crowded round them, won-

dering at the strange, unusual figures who travelled, not for their own business or profit, but to carry that simple tender message to the souls of strangers. The Umbrians and the Anconese no doubt found it very hard to understand. And when the brethren had passed the immediate town or village, and come out again upon those long solitary roads, they resumed their song, with sonorous, clear-toned voices, in all the force and sweetness of early manhood, or talked of the wonderful things which were to be, which Egidio found it hard to understand. "Son (*'figliuolo'*—the word is more caressing than 'son,' but not translateable otherwise), our Order will be like the fisher, who puts his net in the water and takes a great multitude of fishes, keeping the larger ones and leaving the smaller." At this, we are told, Egidio marvelled much; for the whole Order consisted but of himself, Bernard, Pietro, and their founder—a little group not likely, so far as appeared on the surface, to move the world.

There is some uncertainty as to the order of the disciples who followed that first group. The Three Companions give the names of Sabatino, Morito, and Giovanni de Capello as following close upon Egidio; but there is scarcely any mention of these names in the after-story of the life of Francis. Neither do we hear much of Philip, described by Celano as the seventh in succession, who was a man of great oratorical power, "sweet and mellifluous" in preaching. We prefer therefore to take the better known among the early members of the Order, without vouching for the chronology of their admission. Some of those we are about to describe may have been the children of a more advanced period, but they were, at all events, the disciples, companions, and friends of Francis through the remaining portion of his life.

One of the next in succession was Ruffino, who, we are told, belonged to one of the noblest families of Assisi, and was a relation of St. Clare. He, too, had felt the irresistible attraction of that Epistle of God, known and read of all men, which Francis presented to the Umbrian world. Fra Ruffino was, however, a man of a distinct type from the others. It was the life of contemplation, not that of active labour, which was most congenial to him. His temptations were not those of the flesh, but those of the spirit—painful questionings as to his own salvation and the ways of God to man. For days together, we are told, he was absorbed in meditation, lost to all recollection of this world, "almost insensible and dumb"—unwilling, when he could help it, to pronounce a single word. "He had neither grace, ardour, nor faculty in preaching," says the legend; "and was reluctant to be disturbed from sacred contemplation even by the command of his master." A curious occurrence, which must have some foundation of truth, as it is quoted by the early writers, as well as recorded at full length in the *Fioretti*, may be given here. It is very grotesque, as read in the light of our nineteenth-century notions; but we have no reason to suppose that it would bear exactly the same appearance in the thirteenth, though even then it is evident it attracted at first the laughter of the crowd. Francis, watching with anxious paternal eyes the growth of this mystic separation from all common uses of life in the soul of his disciple, commanded him, one day, to go to Assisi and preach; whereupon Brother Ruffino answered:

"'Reverend Father, I pray thee excuse me, and send me not; because, as thou knowest, I have not the gift of preaching, but am simple and unlearned.' And then St.

Francis said, 'Because thou hast not obeyed instantly, I command thee, by thy holy obedience, that, clad in thy "brache" only, thou go to Assisi, and enter into a church and preach to the people.' At this command, the said Brother Ruffino stripped himself, and went to Assisi, and entered into a church, and made his reverence to the altar, and went up into the pulpit and began to preach, at which children and men began to laugh and say, 'See now, these men do so great penance that they become fools and beside themselves.' Meanwhile, St. Francis, pondering over the ready obedience of Brother Ruffino, who was one of the most noble men in Assisi, and of the hard commandment he had enjoined upon him, began to blame himself and to say, 'How hast thou so great boldness, son of Pietro Bernardone, a poor helpless creature, as to command Brother Ruffino, who is one of the most noble in Assisi, to go preach to the people like a fool? By God, thou shalt essay thyself that which thou commandest others.' And of a sudden, in fervour of spirit, he stripped himself in like manner, and went to Assisi, and he took with him Brother Leo to carry his garment and that of Brother Ruffino. And the men of Assisi, seeing him in like guise, mocked him, thinking that both he and Brother Ruffino were crazed by too strict penance. St. Francis entered the church when Brother Ruffino was preaching these words, 'O dearest friends, flee from the world, and leave sin; give up that which is not yours, if ye would escape hell; keep the commandments of God, loving God and your neighbours, if ye would go to heaven; work out your repentance if ye would possess the kingdom of heaven.' Then St. Francis mounted the pulpit, and began to preach so marvellously of contempt of the world, of holy penitence, of voluntary poverty, of the longing for the kingdom of heaven, and of the nakedness and shame of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all who were at the preaching, men and women in great multitude, began to weep exceeding much, with wondrous devotion and piercing of heart; and not only there, but also throughout all Assisi, there was on that day so great a weeping for the passion of Christ, that there had never been the like. And thus the people being edified and comforted by the act of St. Francis and of Brother Ruffino, St. Francis re-clad Brother Ruffino and himself; and thus being re-clad they returned to the Portiuncula praising and glorifying God,

who had given them grace to conquer themselves, by their self-contempt, and to edify the lambs of Christ by good example, and to show how great was their contempt of the world; and in that day the devotion of the people towards them so much increased, that he thought himself happy who could touch the hem of their garment."

Ruffino having come safely out of this ordeal, grew every day still more holy. "By his purity and humility he became," says the primitive biographer, "the terror of demons." As he went through Assisi, begging from door to door, the possessed received him with frightful cries and distortions, and the devils bore witness to his power. Yet at the same time he himself was persecuted by an evil spirit, which took upon itself the holy form of a Crucifix, and tempted him to disbelief through the very lips (as it seemed) of Him who hung on the cross. He was one of the Three Companions who wrote the history of Francis which is called by their name.

And so also was Leo, another Assisan, of whose antecedents we know nothing, but who was one of the earliest members of the Order, and specially beloved by its founder on account of his simplicity. He was the "Pecorello," the little sheep of Francis's fond and tender friendship; and it was evidently a comfort to the saint, among all his cares and troubles, to throw himself upon the simple sympathy of a disciple so docile and unquestioning. It would be impossible to quote half the references to him which occur in the *Fioretti*, all marked with the same childlike, all-believing, innocent nature. He was the secretary and even, we are told, the confessor of Francis in after-times. He was one of those always chosen to accompany him to his retirement among the hills, or when upon any special mission. His love

for his master seems to have been like the love of a faithful dog, whose happiness lies in following everywhere, hearing, and seeing, and touching the master whom he loves. When his simple soul was tempted and troubled, he longed for a bit of paper with something written on it by the hand of Francis, feeling that with that armour he would be safe. Once, when (according to the legend) the saint in a trance was elevated from the ground, and held there by the wonderful might of his ecstasy, simple Leo thrust his own honest, innocent presence into the rapture, and stood weeping and kissing the feet thus mysteriously raised above the common soil. The reader feels that Francis must have been sometimes bored, if we may use the word, by the fondness of his humble disciple; and we find that once or twice, declaring himself to have need of perfect solitude, he courteously and tenderly drew himself away from the society of his adoring friend; but nothing can be more beautiful than the relationship between them —all tender, paternal affection on one side, and all adoration on the other. One of the few private letters of Francis which are preserved to us is addressed to this gentlest disciple:—

"Brother Leo, your brother Francis greets you, and wishes you peace.

"I speak to you, my son, as a mother to a child, and all the words which we have spoken on our journey I sum up and abridge in that word. If, after this, you desire more counsel from me, I advise you to come to me. In whatsoever manner you perceive that you can best please the Lord our God, and follow His example and His poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord, and in my obedience. And if it should be necessary for the good of your soul or your consolation that you should come to me, come, my Leo. Farewell in Christ."

It is probable, however, that it was in extreme youth that Leo entered the Order, as we are told he lived in it for sixty-one years; and this may account in some degree for the simplicity of his first appearances. After the death of Francis, it is evident that he took a more decided part than might have been expected from his natural gentleness, was very warm in his opposition to innovation, and showed sufficient aptitude for ecclesiastical business to be employed in one or two important processes. This, however, is not the phase of his character on which the reader loves to dwell: it is as the "little sheep," the simple idolater, the "Leo mio," of Francis's most tender and friendly soul.

Next comes Masseo of Marignano, the first stranger in the band, a genial brother, full of strength and vigour. He was big and handsome, according to the legend, and, when he begged by the way, had "good pieces and large, and sometimes whole loaves, given to him;" whereas Francis, being little and worn, received only little pieces, and commonly of dry bread. But for the absolute emptiness of the little convent, in which these "buoni pezzi" were the best fare, and water the only drink, we should say there was a certain jovial geniality about the large figure of Fra Masseo. He was a great preacher, as such big, genial men so often are, being full of human sympathy, not profound, and often perplexed, but yet on the surface very warm and full. And he seems to have had also a weakness incident to the character—a good-natured, simple inclination to think well of himself. Francis, whose sympathy had reached the length of insight, and was of a very different kind from that of Masseo, probably perceived the new brother's danger; for one day, we are told, he assembled the entire company, and addressed him

in their presence. "Brother Masseo," said the saint, "all these my companions have the grace of contemplation and of prayer; but thou hast the grace of preaching the word of God to the satisfaction of the people. Therefore, I will, in order that these may give themselves to contemplation, that you undertake the offices of porter, of alms-gatherer, and of cook; and when the other brethren eat, thou shalt eat outside the door; so that when any come to the door, even before they knock, thou mayst satisfy them with good words from God, so that henceforward no one need go out except thee." This strange accumulation of offices Fra Masseo accepted with the usual ready obedience, and fulfilled it with genial simplicity, as we shall shortly see; and it was not at his request, but at that of the brethren, who felt him thrown away in so humble an occupation, that Francis modified his command, and set him at liberty for higher work. A curious gleam of humour is in the way in which the master deals with his large, genial, perhaps somewhat matter-of-fact disciple. Once, when they were setting out together on a journey, Masseo worried his leader to know where they were going, but received no answer until they had come to a place where four roads met, when he was commanded to turn round and round, and not to stop till he had further orders. When he did pause, in obedience to the command of his master, his face was towards Sienna; and accordingly to Sienna they went, where their presence was much wanted, in consequence of a conflict between two factions of the citizens, which Francis made an end of. Masseo's musings on this and other points of his leader's conduct—his sudden trial of him "to see whether he was really humble"—his wonder at the enthusiasm of Francis while they ate their poor meal

by the fountain—and other incidents which may be quoted hereafter—still further disclose the character of a man who could but imperfectly understand his spiritual leader, and was puzzled almost as much as attracted by him. "Why to thee? why to thee?" he says one day, when, turning the whole question over in his mind, he meets Francis, all worn and weary, coming out of the wood where he had been praying. "What say you?" asks Francis, in surprise at the interruption. "I say," answers Masseo, "why should all the world come after thee, and every one desire to see, and hear, and obey thee? Thou art not handsome, thou art not learned, thou art not noble; therefore, why to thee? why does all the world run after thee?" It is "quasi proverbiando" playing upon words, that he says this, according to the *Fioretti;* but no doubt there was a certain subtle expression in it of the bewilderment of his own mind, itself so puzzled, yet so true.

Of all the early companions of Francis, however, there is none whose story is so quaint and so strange as that of a certain Fra Ginepro, whose adventures break into the tale with all the breadth of that grotesque mediæval drollery which has left its traces more upon art than literature. The humble chronicler of the *Fioretti* delights in this strange figure. His utter simpleness and wild liberality, the curious straightforwardness, as of a child or a madman, of his proceedings, charm the primitive mind which has not yet outgrown the feeling that there is such a thing as inspired folly. Francis himself, with a play upon his name (*Ginepro*, Juniper) which also belongs to the age, prays that he might have a wood of such; but yet we imagine might have found it embarrassing had he been taken at his word.

One day this disciple sat by the bedside of a sick brother, who was seized with a sudden desire for a pig's foot—a strange, it seems, and not very refined longing. Ginepro, too vehement to take any time to think, jumped up, "burning with divine love," caught up a knife from the kitchen, and rushed out to that wood which plays so great a part in the tale. Here he found a herd of pigs, feeding in all quiet and security. He does not seem to have taken into consideration in the least the feelings of the victim which was to pay the penalty of his wonderful charity; but, leaping upon the back of one of the herd, cut off its foot, with which he returned exulting to the sick man. Upon this naturally there arose a great tumult. The proprietor of the unhappy pig came to complain, and the whole convent was roused. Only Ginepro was unmoved; he could not conceive how any one could be disturbed because of a charitable act; and when sent by his master after the injured proprietor to beg his pardon, took all his abuse so sweetly, telling him that it was done entirely for charity, that the man, struck by compunction, killed the pig, and sent it entire to the convent—a provision not to be despised.

Nor was this the sole instance of Ginepro's unreasoning liberality: he gave everything he had—his clothes from his person, until the Guardiano forbade him, in the name of holy obedience, to do it again. After this prohibition had been issued, a poor man almost naked came by, asking alms for the love of God. "I have nothing to give but my tunic," said Ginepro, "and I am forbidden by my superior to give that or anything I wear; but if you tear it off my back I will not resist you." The beggar, nothing loth, tore off the robe, leaving Ginepro almost naked, in which plight he returned

to the convent. When he was asked what had become of his gown, he answered, with amusing *naïveté*, "A worthy person took it from me, and went away with it." He gave, however, not only his clothes, but everything he could lay his innocent dishonest hands on, with the same wild charity. A certain foolish sacristan once left him in charge of an altar in the cathedral of Assisi, upon which were many ornaments of price, and especially a certain golden candlestick hung with silver bells. At this perilous moment a poor woman approached, and begged alms from the enthusiast of charity. Ginepro immediately cast his eyes upon the altar, and seeing the silver bells twinkling in the sunshine, at once decided that they were a superfluity; upon which, quick as thought, he took a knife and, hacking them off, gave them "in pity" to the woman. When the poor sacristan returned from his dinner, he saw in a moment the damage which had been done. "Do not disturb yourself," said the calm Ginepro; "I gave them to a poor woman who had great need of them, whereas here they were of no use, but were mere pomp and worldly vanity." The sacristan, in despair, rushed after the woman, and sought through the whole city, but could not find any trace of his silver bells; then he carried his complaint to the general of the Order—not Francis, it would appear; so this incident must have happened after his death. The general told the sacristan roundly that it was not Ginepro's fault, but his own. "You ought to have known his peculiarity, and I marvel for my part that he did not give away the whole," said the head of the Order; but nevertheless called the friar to him, and scolded him with so much vehemence that he lost his voice and became hoarse. Little cared Ginepro for the

reproaches; but he noticed the hoarseness, and his heart was moved with compassion. He went away from the general's presence, anxiously thinking over the best possible remedy; and going into the town, ordered a cake made with butter, with which he returned when it was late, and which he carried at once to the cell of the general. "Padre mio," he said, rousing him, "when you told me of my faults to-day, I saw that it made you hoarse. This could only be because you were exhausted; therefore I have been thinking what was the best remedy, and have had this cake made for you. I pray you to eat it: it will soften your breast and your throat." What could be said to such a tender-hearted simpleton? The two ate the cake together in the middle of the night, "in great charity and brotherly love, and were more refreshed by devotion than by the food," says the quaint and primitive tale.

One more incident from Fra Ginepro's life, and we will leave this portion of the legend. Once upon a time he went to Rome, where the fame of his holiness had travelled before him, and where a multitude of people came to meet him and conduct him into the city. The humble friar had no desire for any such honour. Close by were two children playing at see-saw. The "altalena" has a more dignified sound, but it means the same thing. When he saw this, Ginepro jumped upon the see-saw, and, to the consternation of the worshipping multitude, began to swing up and down, absorbed to all appearance in his amusement. When the crowd was tired of wondering it grew indignant, and finally dispersed; upon which Ginepro descended from his see-saw, much comforted, "tutto consolato," because so many had seen him make a fool of himself! A more grotesque incident

could scarcely be; but yet how full of meaning is the primitive brother's unscrupulous determination to shake off his foolish train of adorers, and the gullibility of the crowd!

There are but one or two notices of Ginepro in the Life of Francis; but the others are perpetually appearing and reappearing. We have omitted one who is, in some respects, the most important of all—Elias of Cortona, a man of high intellect and ambitious hopes, who seems to have exercised a certain influence over Francis himself, and who eventually became his vicar, and successor in the supreme power, though it is evident he was much opposed by the general body, and that even the founder had great doubt of him mingled with his affection. Elias is an altogether different type of man from the simple-minded brethren who first surrounded Francis. He is an ambitious and ascetic churchman, of the class which has pushed Rome into much power and many abuses—an almost conventional development of the intellectual monk, making up for compulsory humbleness in external matters by the highest strain of ecclesiastical ambition and spiritual pride. There can be no doubt that in the simple yet wise organization devised by Francis for the salvation of souls Elias perceived the germ of a powerful corporation—a body not only morally but socially and politically important, which he attempted to shape according to his own ideas more than once during the lifetime of Francis himself; an attempt in which he was foiled, as will be seen, by the severe adherence to his ideal of the mild and tender-hearted master who, ready as he was to give way in other matters, never relinquished his absolute devotion to Poverty and the Apostolical model of life.

Such was the band of Poor Brethren who formed the foundation of the great Franciscan order. We are unable to say with any certainty whether these were all included among the number of the brethren who accompanied Francis to Rome, but they are at least the most prominent figures which surround him in his early wanderings—men of the simplest manners, the fullest faith, the most entire devotion to their leader; regarding with never-failing gratitude and reverence the man who had called them out of the world and its selfish occupations into that higher existence which has for its first principle the rule of self-denial, and finds its highest and most perfect example in the life of Christ.

CHAPTER IV.

BEGINNING OF THE RULE.

As soon as his disciples had reached the number of seven, Francis, in all things literal to the example of his Master, sent them out by twos, as our Lord sent His disciples, to all the quarters of the earth—or rather to all the four winds, for they do not seem to have attempted to proceed beyond Umbria—to preach. He made them an affectionate address before they separated, differing in little from our Lord's instructions to His disciples. "'Go,' said our sweet father to his children," says Bonaventura, "'proclaim peace to men; preach repentance for the remission of sins. Be patient in tribulation, watchful in prayer, strong in labour, moderate in speech, grave in conversation, thankful for benefits.' And to each separately, as he took leave of him, he said, 'Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee.'" We are not informed how long this first evangelical journey lasted; but the preachers met with all the ordinary varieties of reception. Some hailed them eagerly, receiving their teaching as from Heaven; some mobbed them in the streets, calling them madmen; in some places the women and children fled at sight of those strange brown figures, barefooted and girded with ropes, which are now so familiar in Italian cities; but wherever they went they roused the public mind,

sometimes to interest, sometimes to violent opposition, always, at least, to curiosity and wonder. And already this bold pictorial lesson, this presentation of the Lady Poverty and her sworn companions before the astonished eyes of a world which fought and struggled, and massacred and ravaged, for riches and power, had begun to tell.

Up to this time the little company had lived together by the simple exercise of their own will, without any Rule, or formal bond to each other. Francis was their natural leader; it was he who had drawn them by his example out of the world, and to whom they looked as their guide; but they were, as yet, under no legitimate subjection to him, nor were they bound to the life of hardship which they had voluntarily adopted. When the little house at the Portiuncula was so full that the companions had scarcely room to lie down, it became at last a matter of necessity to give to the family a certain constitution and *raison d'être*. And it was while this thought was growing in his mind that Francis was visited by those visions of the future extension of his Order, which mark the period of his transition from the station of a private individual to that of a public leader, founder, legislator, and ruler. This transition was natural and gradual, without any artificial sign or wonder. His early companions gathered around him without any effort of his; and the necessity of some order of life, by which they could be guided, became slowly manifest to him, as he became aware of the unexpected responsibility which had fallen upon his shoulders. And when he rose from his short slumbers upon the earthen floor of his little house, and stole out to his prayers while all the brethren slept, turning over in his devout mind

what was best to be done for them, there stole over him a prophetic sense of future greatness—which might or might not be revealed from heaven, but which nature herself and the insight of a mind already much conversant with humanity, and overflowing with that sympathy which draws others to itself, and divines the rising emotions within them, might well have given. He felt that the little nucleus of brethren, drawn from all classes, whom he had left asleep behind him—the simple and illiterate townsman resting beside the eloquent orator and the noble citizen—was but an earnest of the future. On one such occasion, Celano informs us, he had gone out to his accustomed devotions, his heart heavy with thought and anxiety, and in his depression able to say nothing but "God be merciful to me, a sinner" (indeed, he was never, it would seem, fond of many words in prayer), when suddenly an unspeakable ecstasy filled his breast, and the greatness of the work he was beginning, and the immense harvest which his spiritual children should reap for God, became visible to him. When he returned to his brethren, he bade them rejoice with him. "Be comforted, my dearest" (*carissimi*), he said, "and rejoice in God, and let us not be sad because we are few; for it has been shown to me by God that you shall increase to a great multitude, and shall go on increasing to the end of the world. I see a multitude of men coming to me from every quarter: French, Spaniards, Germans, and English, each in their different tongues, encouraging the others." Probably his followers had some difficulty in believing such a prophecy, and wondered, like Egidio; but yet we are told they were glad, reflecting the sentiment of their Master.

Amid these encouragements the Rule was made. It consists, like other monastic rules, of the three great vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, differing only in so far that the poverty ordained by Francis was absolute. In other rules, though the individual was allowed to possess nothing, the community had often rich possessions; and there was no reason why the monks should not fare sumptuously and secure to themselves many earthly enjoyments notwithstanding their individual destitution and their vow. But among the Brothers Minor there was not to be so much as a provision secured for the merest daily necessities. Day by day they were to live by God's providence, eating what was given to them, taking no thought how they were to be fed, or wherewithal clothed: "neither gold nor silver in your purses;" not even the scrip to collect fragments in—as if God could not provide for every returning necessity. There had been monasteries in Italy for centuries and the Benedictines were already a great and flourishing community; but this absolute renunciation of all things struck a certain chill to the hearts of all who heard of it, except the devoted band who had no will but that of Francis. His friend, the Bishop of Assisi, was one of those who stumbled at this novel and wonderful self-devotion. "Your life, without a possession in the world, seems to me most hard and terrible," said the compassionate prelate. "My lord," said Francis, "if we had possessions, arms and protection would be necessary to us." There was a force in this response which perhaps we can scarcely realize; but the Assisan bishop, who knew something of the temper of the lords of Umbria, and knew how lonely were the brethren dwelling on the Church-lands—the little plot (Portiuncula) a whole half league from the

city gates—understood and perceived the justice of the reply.

Another grand distinction of the Rule drawn up by Francis was the occupation it prescribed to its members. They were not to shut themselves up, or to care first for their own salvation. They were to preach—this was their special work; they were to proclaim repentance and the remission of sins; they were to be heralds of God to the world, and proclaim the coming of His kingdom. It is not possible to suppose that, when he thus began to organize, the mind of Francis did not make a survey of the establishments already in existence—the convents bound by the same three great vows, where life at this moment was going on so placidly, with flocks and herds and vineyards to supply the communities, and studious monks in their retirement, safe from all secular anxieties, fostering all the arts in their beginning, and carrying on the traditions of learning; while all around them the great unquiet, violent world heaved and struggled, yet within the convent walls there was leisure and peace. Blessed peace and leisure it was often, let us allow—preserving for us the germs of many good things we now enjoy, and raising little centres of safety, and charity, and brotherly kindness through the country in which they were placed. But such quiet was not in the nature of Francis. So far as we can make out, he had thought little of himself—even of his own soul to be saved—all his life. The trouble on his mind had been what to do—how sufficiently to work for God, and to help men. His fellow-creatures were dear to him: he gave them his cloak from his shoulders many a day, and the morsel from his own lips; and would have given them the heart from his bosom, had that been pos-

sible. Therefore, for him there was no question of seclusion, of cloistered quiet and still learning, or of a life devoted to art. For himself and for his brethren, he desired active service and living influence upon men. He was not of the world, but yet he would not be taken out of the world. In short, now as ever, it was the life of his Lord which was his foundation and example: he longed to move about those Umbrian ways, as He had trodden the ways of Galilee—to preach, and exhort, and reprove, and entreat with such tender wiles of parable and type as the servant might adopt from the Master. It was with difficulty that he could yield himself to the necessity of securing a roof to shelter his companions; for the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. But in every other way, with a touching literalness, he would follow that great Example, not only in the spirit, but in the very letter and absolute fact of life.

Even the name which he chose for his little community is full of simple significance; not Franciscans, as we call them now, but Frati Minores—Lesser Brothers—as who should say, the least of all saints, the poorest and humblest of God's servants. When the Rule was written, which, with the voluminousness of an unpractised writer, at first filled "twenty-three chapters, each containing twenty-seven precepts," Francis called together his companions, who had by this time risen to the number of eleven, and proposed to them that they should go to Rome, and ask the sanction of the Pope. This, we are informed in the *Histoire des Ordres Monastiques*, was not necessary, nor had it been the custom of other religious orders to seek it; but Francis, always unassuming, would have nothing established on his own sole

authority. The journey from Assisi to Rome is not a very long one; but the barefooted brethren went on foot, carrying, according to their rule, neither purse nor provision. They set off, however, cheerfully on their journey, having first elected one among them to be "a kind of Vicar of Jesus Christ," to whom they were to give entire obedience. It was Brother Bernard whom they elected to this office; and so set out, with songs of praise, upon the tedious way: God prepared shelter and food for them, we are told, and their frequent refuge at night was a deserted church, of which there seem to have been in those days many in Umbria. When they arrived in Rome, they were received cordially by their own bishop, who, however, seems to have rather discouraged them in respect to the Pope, being afraid, as we are told, that they might be tempted to desert their own country; "for it was a great joy to him to have so many men of life and morals so exalted in his diocese." The Bishop of Assisi, however, introduced them to the notice of Giovanni di San Paolo, the cardinal-bishop of the Sabina, who was the first protector of the Order. According to the Three Companions, Francis was introduced to Pope Innocent III. by this powerful and dignified patron. But Bonaventura gives a different version of the story. According to his account, the humble pilgrim approached the ruler of Christendom without any prelate or prince to stand by him. Innocent was walking on one of th terraces of the Lateran, lost in thought, occupied, no doubt, with some problem of the great European community of nations, over which he held so extraordinary a sway, when a poor stranger, in the dress of a shepherd, presented himself to his notice. The Pope, angry at such an invasion of his privacy, sent

the intruder hastily away. But that night, all our historians agree in telling us, the great Pope was enlightened by a dream from heaven. There are, indeed, two dreams recorded equally significant and to the purpose. "He saw a palm-tree gradually grow up at his feet until it reached a goodly stature, and as he gazed upon it wondering what the vision might mean, a divine illumination impressed on the mind of the Vicar of Christ that this palm-tree signified the poor man whom he had that day driven from his presence." The other dream was that he saw the great church of St. John Lateran, near which he had been walking when Francis went to him first, falling to the ground, when it was suddenly propped up by that same poor figure in the shepherd's frock. Next morning, Bonaventura tells us, he sent to inquire for the stranger, and found him close by, in the Hospital of St. Antony, near the Lateran. It is very probable that by this time Francis, who, with all his simplicity, had yet the practical habits of a man accustomed to earthly business, availed himself of the protection of his friend the Cardinal. And it is still more likely that the sagacious Innocent perceived at once that the meanly dressed stranger was one of those exceptional men, of whom the Church of Rome has always been wise enough to take advantage.

The Rule seems to have been submitted to the Conclave of Cardinals, who pondered over it with natural hesitation. It must have been hard enough for these princely priests to realize how men could be found ready to give up everything, even daily bread, in so complete a manner for Christ's sake. "It seemed to some of the cardinals that the Rule was a novelty, and beyond human strength to observe"—as it had appeared to the Bishop of Assisi, and to almost every

wise counsellor who had been referred to on the subject; but the Cardinal di San Paolo, with better judgment, gave his vote on the other side. "If we refuse this poor man's petition, as a novelty too hard to be observed—whereas he only begs for the confirmation of the evangelical way of life—let us take heed lest we offend against the Gospel of Christ," he said, with that wonderful wisdom in dealing with the exceptional which has almost always characterized the Roman Church. "If it is of God, it will stand," said wise Gamaliel, in an elder age. "But if it is of God, and stands, let Holy Church have the good of it," has always been the sentiment of Rome—a sentiment which it is vain to call interested, since the welfare of Holy Church assuredly meant the welfare of Christendom, to the Pope and his Council in the beginning of the thirteenth century. According to Bonaventura, Innocent still hesitated, and sent the applicant away for the time. On their next interview Francis came armed with a parable. "There was," he said, "a rich and mighty king who took to wife a poor but very beautiful woman, who lived in a desert, in whom he greatly delighted, and by whom he had children who bore his image. When her sons were grown their mother said to them, 'My sons, be not ashamed; ye are the children of a king.' And she sent them to the court, having supplied them with all necessaries. When they came to the king, he admired their beauty; and seeing in them some resemblance to himself, asked them, 'Whose sons are ye?' When they replied that they were the sons of a poor woman dwelling in the desert, the king, filled with much joy, said, "Fear not, ye are my sons; and if I nourish strangers at my table, how much more you, who are my legitimate children.''

This parable, according to the Three Companions, was perfectly conclusive to Pope Innocent. The poor woman in the desert, so lovely and lonely, was Poverty, whom Dante calls the widowed spouse of Jesus Christ; and the poor brethren in their shepherds' tunics were her sons, and the sons of the king. Nothing can be more probable than that this picturesque argument, proof of a mind overflowing with that vivid pictorial eloquence which moves the multitude, should have gone a long way to persuade the wise Pope that this was not an instrument to be thrown away. After some further delay, a verbal confirmation was given to the Rule, and a conditional promise. "Go, in the name of the Lord," said Pope Innocent, "and in His strength preach repentance to all. And when God has multiplied you in numbers and grace, come back to me, and I will give you greater gifts, and commit to you better privileges." He then put the mark of the Church upon the twelve brethren, now dignified provisionally into an independent Order. He commanded that they should receive the tonsure, so that, though not priests, they might be considered clerks. The joy of the little band was extreme. When they had received the Pope's blessing, and that sign of consecration, they visited devoutly the tombs of the Apostles, and set out shoeless, staffless, without a penny, or a purse to put one into, without a crust of bread for their journey, upon their way home. They travelled joyously, Francis, with his old skill, shortening the weary road with song—and once at least fell to talking so earnestly, reasoning together of the ways of God to man, that the hour of their usual meal came and passed; and as hunger began to seize them, they found that they were out in the open country, far from any village in which they could beg the daily

morsel which sufficed them. At this moment a man appeared, gave them some bread, and went his way. God provided for them, as He did for Elijah. Such was the joyful conclusion in their hearts.

Thus commenced the Order of the Frati Minores, a title for which in English we can find no more euphonious synonym than that of Little (literally, Lesser) Brothers. And from this time it is our business to regard Francis, not so much in his individual character —the generous, impetuous, tender, friendly, natural being we have known him—as in his position as a great ruler of men, a prophet and teacher of extraordinary influence, and, like the mournful Ezekiel in an older dispensation, a sign and wonder to the world.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT THE PORTIUNCULA.

WE have said it is now our business to regard Francis no longer as a private individual, but as the leader of an ever-increasing community, destined to multiply as never kingdom multiplied, and to surround him, ere many years had elapsed, with an army as powerful in numbers as that of many an independent nation, and more closely knit together by one enthusiastic bond of devotion than ever was any secular army ; but this, in one sense, is a vain attempt. For Francis is always Francis to his last day : in his brown cowl, with the rope knotted round his waist, he is the same light-hearted, courteous soul as that pleasant Cecco of Assisi who went singing his gay Provençal songs about the stony streets. His stern life has not taken from him a jot of that courageous cheerfulness. The monk, like the merchant's son, is as gracious in his courtesy as if he had been a prince, and never for a moment loses that rare faculty of entering into the feelings of others which is the root of all true politeness. The twelve, we have said, wandered home again, after they had obtained their wish from Rome. But the truth was, they had no home to go to, the poor little shed at the Portiuncula having either become uninhabitable or having been temporarily withdrawn

from them. They went slowly upon their way, and lingered, Celano tells us, for a fortnight near the town of Orta, within the boundaries of the States of the Church, preaching daily in the city, and begging their food. At this point of their journey a doubt seems to have arisen among them, in their many discussions how best to keep their Rule—whether seclusion from men in some solitary place would not be the form of service most pleasing to God ; a doubt which recurs at two or three periods of their history. It is hard to understand how such a question could ever have arisen with Francis, seclusion having evidently been the very last thing in his thoughts in drawing up his Rule ; but probably some of the brethren inclined in favour of this fashion of life, and their leader was not a man to sacrifice what he supposed the welfare of his brethren to any theory of his own. When they consulted God in prayer, however, it was revealed to them, that they were not sent into the world for their own advantage, but for the good of others, like their Divine Master—an answer which we cannot but feel must have been a great relief to Francis. And then the lover of nature resumed his journey, moved thereto by the strangest motive. Orta and its vicinity was too fair, too seductive, to the eye and the imagination. A man could not keep the vigour of his soul, with nature smiling so softly round him. They went on accordingly, "by cities and castles," say the biographers, with picturesque brevity ; now into a walled and guarded mediæval town, not yet enriched with the grand edifices of that architecture which we call Gothic, passing, with a crowd after them, into the Piazza, or Square, where the markets were held, and all the holidays kept—and where the brethren in their brown gowns stood

round their leader, as he poured forth addresses, glowing and burning from his heart, upon the astonished crowd; now toiling up the steep paths to some great feudal castle, where the men-at-arms would wonder and perhaps gibe at them, and the idle fellows in the guard-room turn out to stare, and my lord come forth with his sword clinking at his heels, perhaps in the tedium of the evening after a long, long, blazing Italian day, thankful to inquire what novelty even this band of beggars might have brought from Rome. We are told that it was the unanimity with which one whole castle-full of penitent people, lord and lady, officers and retainers, resolved to follow the preacher and renounce the world, that startled Francis into the establishment of his Third Order—an order intended for laymen and lay-women, and requiring no sacrifice beyond that of the heart. There is something almost comic in the midst of the gravity of the situation, in such an incident—a whole community of people, husbands and wives and little children, rough soldiers used to little restraint, gay bower-maidens and pages, and all the variety of vassals that made up the retinue of a mediæval noble, getting up, with tears running down their dark cheeks, to follow the preacher with one accord—to go they knew not where, and live they knew not how. Such a demonstration of popular enthusiasm must have alarmed Francis notwithstanding the warmth of his own devotion to Holy Poverty and the immediate service of Christ. He was too wise, in his perfect naturalness and sincerity, to believe it possible that the common uses of the world could be thus abandoned, and ordinary duties thrown away. He calmed down his excited audience by the promise of a Rule to be established

for them, and an Order into which they could enter without shaking the foundations of heaven and earth; and no doubt was glad when he got safely out of the gates, and found himself with no troop after him on the road that led to Assisi. A more startling incident never befell a preacher. And thus, "by cities and castles,"[1] they made their return journey, bidding the peace of God to all they met, preaching wherever opportunity offered, thankfully resting in any house that was open to them, or in some ruined church if no other shelter was to be had—travelling as their Lord travelled, repaying with blessing and instruction their daily morsel of bread.

When they reached the neighbourhood of their native town, the twelve brethren, probably without any premeditation, stopped at a deserted hut, which seems to have been situated upon the wayside, at a place called Rivo-Torto, and where they appear to have remained for some time. Here their food seems to have consisted, during a considerable part of their stay, of turnips only, bread having failed in their daily quests. But the thatched hovel was at least large enough to afford to each a certain allotment of the earthen floor and bare wall on which his name was written, that he might have a nook to retire into for prayer, when he would. It was, apparently, while living in this place that the brethren asked from their leader a form of prayer. They had no ecclesiastical books out of which to say the canonical hours; and it must be remarked that they were untrained lay-

[1] *Castello* means a village as well as a castle, and is probably more often used in the former sense; but that it sometimes meant the latter is made clear by the story of the meeting between Francis and Ser Orlando of Chiusi, at the great stronghold of Montefeltro, which shall be hereafter quoted.

men, not yet accustomed to the elaborate and oft-repeated services of the clergy. The prayers which Francis prescribed to them were the *Pater Noster* and the prayer *Adoramus Te, Christe*—"We adore Thee, O Christ, in all Thy churches which are in all the world, and we bless Thee because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world." When they saw either a church or a cross, however far off, they knelt down and humbly repeated these two prayers—their liturgy and entire vocabulary of worship. In this brief and simple formula we recognize the man whom Bernardo watched the whole night through, saying nothing but "My God, my God!" in the ecstasy of his devotion. The residence of the brethren at Rivo-Torto was cut short by the brutality of a passing rustic, whose sudden entrance led Francis to abandon this shelter and lead his disciples once more to his favourite spot, at the Portiuncula, where they henceforward fixed their abode. The little church, with some small surrounding plot of ground, belonged to the Benedictines of Monte Subiaco, the Convent of St. Benedict, who bestowed the poor little scrap of soil, with its abandoned chapel, upon the man who had, in his poverty, restored and re-established the ruined sanctuary. We are told that a kind of quit-rent was long paid for this, in the shape of a basket of fish called loschi, from an adjoining stream, which were sent yearly by the brethren to the great community far away among the Sabine hills; but it is clear that the cradle and home of the Franciscan Order, henceforward as famous as Monte Subiaco itself, was as much an alms to Francis as was the bread which he and his disciples begged in the streets of Assisi day by day.

The life thus begun is revealed to us in many simple details, out of which it is not difficult to form

a picture. The brethren do not seem to have had any formal division of their time—so many hours for study, so many for work, so many for manual labour —as was the case in the older Orders. They were to hear mass once a day, if it were possible, as the Church of Rome exhorts all her children to do ; but were not bound to special conventual services. They went and came freely, begging yet bestowing, giving to any whom they might encounter, who were as poor as themselves, of that bread of charity which, to Francis, was as the bread of angels. Money they were bound not to touch under any conditions—not even for the relief of the poor. It would almost seem as if the first eight disciples, either by right of special endowments or by the inexperience of their leader, were all preachers; but when the Order consolidated, it was only those who were found qualified for this office who received the licence of Francis to preach.

By this time, not much more than three years from the moment when the pale penitent was hooted through Assisi amid the derisive shouts of the people, and driven with blows and curses into confinement in his own father's house, we find that it has already become his custom on Sunday to preach in the cathedral ; and that, from his little convent at the Portiuncula, Francis has risen into influence in the whole country, which no doubt by this time was full of stories of his visit to Rome and intercourse with the Pope, and all the miraculous dreams and parables with which that intercourse was attended. Already the mind of the people, so slow to adopt, but so ready to become habituated to, anything novel, had used itself to the sight of the brethren in their brown gowns, and, leaping from one extreme to the other,

instead of madmen, learned to consider them saints. The air about the little cloister began to breathe of miracles—miracles which must have been a matter of common report among the contemporaries of the saint, for Celano wrote within three years of Francis's death. Once, when their leader was absent, a sudden wonder startled the brethren. It was midnight between Saturday and Sunday, and Francis, who had gone to preach at Assisi, was at the moment praying in the canon's garden. A chariot of fire, all radiant and shining, suddenly entered the house, awaking those who lay asleep, and moving to wonder and awe those who watched, or laboured, or prayed. It was the heart and thoughts of their leader returning to them in the midst of his prayer, which were figured by this appearance. At another time, a passing minstrel—entering by chance into a church where Francis was preaching, without knowing him—saw upon the person of the preacher the likeness of two flaming swords which formed the sign of the cross; by means of this vision he was converted, and was afterwards known as Brother Pacifico—a troubadour-monk, who lent the aid of his skill to Francis in the revision of his poems, and went out with him about the roads and streets singing them, so that the people wept with delight and tenderness. What a strange little house must that have been, from which, sometimes, these two would come forth singing the impassioned songs, half improvised, half premeditated, by which Francis gave a beginning to Italian poetry; and whence sometimes preachers issued, and sometimes beggars, all returning like bees to the hive—the singers with their meed of tears and smiles and popular enthusiasm; the preachers with their converts and tales of sin abandoned, and goods given to the poor; and the

caterers of the convent with their alms of bread and fragments! "Because they possessed nothing earthly," says Bonaventura, employing almost the very words used by his predecessors, "loved nothing earthly, and feared to lose nothing earthly, they were secure in all places: troubled by no fears, distracted by no cares, they lived, without trouble of mind, waiting without solicitude for the coming day, or the night's lodging."

We find many curious little indications of the impression made upon the contemporary mind by the circumstances of their life, in the *Fioretti*. In every sketch the popular chronicler gives of the interior of the convent there is some glimpse of Francis stealing out into the wood to pray. "The wood," in this narrative, occupies the position which a secluded convent-garden—one of those green, peaceful, soberly-luxuriant places in which the monks pace about in meditation undisturbed by the world—holds in other monastic stories. Probably the Portiuncula had not even such a refuge. There is a little door which leads to the wood in the little convent, and from this we constantly see the figure of Francis emerging, disappearing within the sacred, mysterious woodland depths. Once it is an inquisitive boy who reveals it to us—perhaps that very boy of Assisi, of whom we are told, without any name, that it was he who had first followed the saint. The child was seized with a sudden boyish curiosity to know where Francis went when he stole out in the darkness of the night from among the sleeping brethren. To satisfy his curiosity, he made an innocent-cunning attempt to awake himself when Francis should rise, intertwining the rope which was his girdle with that of his master. But, having done this, the sleep proper to his age overpowered the child; and when

Francis arose in the dead of night, he found out the simple artifice, and, gently detaching his girdle, made his way softly through the sleeping brethren on the floor around him (for the house was then so small that they slept in rows), and went out by the little door into the silence and the rustling wood. A short time after the child awoke, and, emboldened by curiosity, followed.

"Finding the door open which went into the wood, he followed him there; and when he was come near to the place in which Francis prayed, began to hear a great sound of talking, and approaching closer to see and to hear what it was, he beheld a wonderful light, which surrounded Francis, and in that saw Christ, and the Virgin Mary, and St. John Baptist and the Evangelist, and a great multitude of angels, who talked with Francis. When the mystery of this holy appearance presented itself, at the sight and hearing of these wonders the boy fell to the ground. When St. Francis left the spot, he found the child lying in the path like one dead, and raised him up, putting him upon his shoulders, as the Good Shepherd does to his sheep. Then, hearing from him that he had seen this vision, he commanded him that he should not speak of it as long as he was alive. This child, afterwards growing in the grace of God and devotion of St. Francis, became a worthy member of the Order, and after the death of Francis revealed the vision."

Another time the scene changes, and it is daylight. But again Francis is in the wood, lost in the intensity of devotion. This time it is a stranger, a beautiful youth in a travelling dress, who comes to the door. He is in reality an angel, bound on a curious, half-sarcastic mission to Brother Elias, the future disturber of the Order, who, moved by that exaggerated asceticism which so often is but a cloak for carnal inclinations, had proposed, against the will and intention of Francis, to debar the brethren from eating meat. The angel puts his question in an ironical way,

not common, one would suppose, to angels, save in the strangely matter-of-fact and literal stories of them current in Italy—but gets no satisfaction from crafty Elias. What is more to our present purpose than his question, is the pretty, quaint glimpse into the conventual economy which Fra Matteo conveys to the celestial visitant at the convent-door. "The brothers marvelled much," says the chronicler, "at such an unusual knocking."

"Fra Matteo opened the door, and said to the youth, 'Whence comest thou, my son? It appears by thy knocking that thou hast never been here before.' The youth answered, 'How should I knock?' 'Knock three times, one after the other,' said Fra Matteo; 'then wait a space, that the frati may have time to say a Paternoster and come to thee; and if in that interval they come not, knock once more.'"

Thus the still house comes before us, with the fresh woods so near, and the Master praying, and the brothers who say the Paternoster before they lift the latch. Vain repetition! let the critic say; yet where is the devout soul who in silence and solitude can say too often, "Our Father, which art in heaven"?

This angel, who is the sauciest of celestial spirits, rushes over land and sea the next moment to meet Fra Bernardo on his travels, and tells him with what, were he aught but an angel, would be a humorous twinkle in his bright young eyes, how Fra Matteo taught him to knock according to the fashion of the frati, and how Fra Elias was struck dumb, and could not answer his questions. The chronicler, one cannot but think, in this instance has unwittingly permitted himself to imagine the existence of some youthful creature in the heavens, not so unlike as he ought to have been to the mischievous page of earth.

To return, however, to the Master, whose tender heart recurred to his disciples in the midst of his own devotions, using the heavenly chariots for its spiritual journey—he was also, we are told, by divine grace, cognizant of the thoughts which they did not venture to put into words. A certain Brother Richerio, one of the humbler members of the community—though, as we learn from Celano, a man of noble birth—had a great longing for the affection of Francis, and at the same time entertained one of those timid fancies which so often accompany love, that for some secret reason Francis thought badly of him, and did not at all return his regard. This thought weighed upon his mind all the more that he seems to have taken the approbation of Francis as a token of the love of God. The poor frate went sadly about his usual occupations, turning over and over, in troubled musings, the doubt which embittered his life. One day, as he passed the cell where his leader was praying, Francis suddenly called him. "Let not this temptation disturb you, my son," he said, with his natural cordial tenderness; "be not troubled in your thoughts, for you are dear to me, and even among the number of those who are most dear. You know that you are worthy of my friendship and society; therefore come to me, in confidence, whensoever you will, and from friendship learn faith." Can we wonder that the heart of Fra Richerio swelled within him at this simple address, and that his devout and tender imagination henceforward attributed to the brother, who was to him the first of men, an infallible insight into all the secrets of the soul?

On another occasion the same insight, miraculous to the eyes of his simple followers, made Francis aware that one of the brethren, who had injured his

health by excessive fasting, was "so pinched with hunger" that, on a certain night, he was unable to sleep. He got up immediately, took some bread, and, going to the cell of the starving brother, began to eat, inviting him to share his frugal supper. The sufferer, thus delivered from the shame of yielding to his own innocent and natural craving, ate, and was rescued from that supremacy of bodily sensations which, though few ascetics have confessed it, as often accompanies extreme abstinence as indulgence. This truth Francis seems to have perceived for others, if not for himself. He called the brethren together in the morning, and told them what had passed, recommending, it would seem, his own example to their imitation, that they might thus succour each other when austerity went beyond due limits; but also exhorting them to "follow discretion, which is the charioteer of all the virtues." The modern reader will be tempted to think that in both these instances, as in many others that might be quoted, a miraculous knowledge of the secrets of the heart was scarcely necessary; but to common men, occupied in the first place with their own affairs, whether temporal or spiritual, and not consciously entering into the feelings of others, is there not always something in the wonderful insight of sympathy which is miraculous and divine?

While he was so gentle with others, however, Francis was very hard upon himself. In the position which he now occupied, it was necessary for him not unfrequently to dine at great tables, and eat with lords and princes. His rule in such cases was the Gospel rule, "Eat what is set before you;" and he was very strenuous in urging upon his brethren the duty of refraining from all blame of others in respect

to these indulgences. But when he himself was served with sumptuous fare, he seasoned the meal so as to take away from it all its pleasantness. With a smile and gentle jest, "Brother Ash is pure," he sprinkled ashes on the dainty food, and ate it cheerfully, while his host, the bishop or the cardinal, and all their splendid guests, looked on and wondered. Or, lifting the glass of water by his side, he would pour it over his plate as he talked, always courteous, omitting no observance of good manners, and rejecting nothing that was placed before him. And again the modern critic may ask, Why? But those were the days so often recurring in the history of the Church, when the fat priest was the jest of the multitude, and the love of good eating was supposed to be a special sin of the cloister, as it has, with or without reason, always been considered a characteristic reproach of the clergy in all ages. How the vulgar, rich noble, full of rustic jests against the monks who "made gude kail on Fridays when they fasted," must have stared at the tonsured brother in his brown gown, who made no parade of abstinence, but sprinkled "Brother Ash" over his rich food, or deluged it with water, talking all the while with the cheerful composure of a man who was but doing what was natural and necessary! At other times, however, Francis's self-mortification took a still more striking form. Celano records that once, when ill, he had been persuaded to eat some chicken —an indulgence which weighed upon his conscience as soon as he recovered. No doubt he represented to himself, with all the graphic force of imagination, the character he bore in the district, and the faith with which his neighbours regarded his supposed self-denial and austerity of life; and yet to his own consciousness he had cared so much for the flesh and

its comforts that he had eaten delicate food while many had not even bread! The result was, that a new spectacle was provided for the people of Assisi. They saw Francis appear at their gates with a rope round his neck, led by a brother, who proclaimed aloud the crime with which he charged himself. "Behold," he said, "a glutton who eats the flesh of fowls, though you know it not." The sight drew tears from the mediæval crowd. They saw nothing ludicrous, nothing exaggerated, in the penance; but the bold emblem struck them as words could not have done. "What idolaters are we," they cried, "who spend our lives in shedding blood, and are filled, soul and body, with luxury and drunkenness!" Thus the too tender, imaginative conscientiousness and scrupulous honesty of the poor preacher startled those primitive souls with a sudden compunction as if an arrow had struck them from heaven.

There is but one more incident, and that of a very different kind, which we may add to these curious particulars of the life of Francis in this its second phase. He had renounced all things—not only the lusts of the flesh, if they had ever existed in him, but also the tenderer charm of the affections, which were so much more likely to hold such a spirit fast. He had given up without hesitation, as would appear, all the indefinite sweetness of youthful hopes. But, nevertheless, he was still young, still a man, with human instincts and wishes, the tenderest nature, and an imagination full of all the warmth and grace of his age and his country. It does not appear that he ever put into words the musings which caught him unawares—the relics of old dreams or soft recollections which now and then would steal into his heart. But one night suddenly he rose from the earthen

floor which was his bed, and rushed out into the night in an access of rage and passion and despair. A certain brother who was praying in his cell, peering, wondering, through his little window, saw him heap together seven masses of snow in the clear moonlight. "Here is thy wife," he said to himself; "these four are thy sons and daughters, the other two are thy servant and thy handmaid; and for all these thou art bound to provide. Make haste, then, and provide clothing for them, lest they perish with cold. But if the care of so many trouble thee, be thou careful to serve our Lord alone." Bonaventura, who tells the story, goes on, with the true spirit of a monkish historian, to state how, "the tempter, being vanquished, departed, and the holy man returned victorious to his cell." The piteous human yearning that lies underneath this wild tale, the sudden access of self-pity and anger, mixed with a strange attempt, not less piteous than the longing, at self-consolation—all the struggle and conflict of emotion which stilled themselves, at least for the moment, by that sudden plunge into the snow, and wild, violent, bodily exertion, are either lost upon the teller of the tale, or perhaps he fears to do his master injustice by revealing any consciousness of the possibility of such thoughts. But it is a very remarkable peculiarity of Francis's history, that whereas every saint in the calendar, from Antony downwards, is sometimes troubled with visions of voluptuous delight, only Francis, in his pure dreams, is tempted by the modest joys of wife and children—the most legitimate and tenderest love. Did a recollection cross his mind as he pondered of some past hope that might have been? Did he forget the hard rule, the universal renunciation, the poverty, to which he had bound himself? Had he, for one sweet, mise-

rable moment, gone back to some old imagination, and "seen the unborn faces shine beside the never-lighted fire"? But Francis does not say a word of any such trial going on in his heart. He dissipates the dream by the chill touch of the snow, by still Nature hushing the fiery thoughts, by sudden action, so violent as to stir the blood in his veins; and then the curtain of prayer and silence falls over him, and the convent-walls close, black, around.

This story, however, is not to be taken as any evidence that Francis regretted the renunciation of the world which he had made. It is evident in every particular of his life that he did not regret it; but he was a man subject to all the tumult of fancy and thought, like other men; and the temptations of few other men, or at least of few other saints, as recorded in their own legends, have been so spotless and free from blame.

While all these things were going on, the Order increased day by day. Wherever the brethren preached, wherever they had preached from the beginning, the universal heart was stirred. Penitents streamed after them from every region where they passed. Out of the very violence, and self-seeking, and intense practical acquisitiveness of the world, their exaggeration of humility and self-renunciation, their utter separation from every worldly possibility of advantage became more and more attractive. It was no feeble outcry superficially made, no mild decorous copy of the life outside made within a convent wall; but a protestation at once bold and striking, almost violent, against all the favourite vices of ordinary existence. And every soul that had kept silence, and burned with inward fire, to see the injustice and oppression of which the earth was full,

and every generous heart that had begun to wake to an aching sense of all the miserable injustices of life, welcomed with delighted surprise the new-comers, who were as Christ, going about the world doing good. They were so bare and denuded of all things amongst those rustling, silken crowds, so helpless and unprotected amid all tyrannies and oppressions, undertaking voluntarily the hardships of the poorest to comfort them, yet confronting the richest and most powerful in all the independence of men who had nothing to lose. They had but their lives, of all that they once possessed; and their lives they were ready to part with, any day, joyfully for Christ's sake: nay, looked forward, as to the only glory possible, to that martyrdom which some sought successfully, but many in vain. Francis himself, as will be hereafter shown, had this lingering hope in his breast after he had given up all others—a last infirmity of the noble mind; but it is needless to enlarge upon the unlimited capability of an order of men from whom nothing but their lives could be taken, and who regarded martyrdom as the most glorious of hopes.

The first twelve soon grew into a little army; and as soon as the new members were sufficiently well known to make apparent any special talents there might be in them, they were sent forth two and two into new places, those who could preach being licensed by Francis, according to the power given him by Pope Innocent. They followed the evangelical precept in the strictest literalness. If there was a priest who would receive them, they went to that priest; if not, they asked for the most worthy in the place, and dwelt with him till they had drawn a little band of new brethren round them, and a habitation had to be found for yet another community. Their rule of

absolute poverty removed all limitation to the increase of the Order. With all the other monastic communities, a certain foundation, however small, was requisite—a garden and vineyard, at the least—the means of getting bread. But no such restriction bound the Franciscans, and their numbers grew on every side. The Bollandist fathers, after much examination of all the early records, conclude the first Chapter to have taken place in the year 1212—only six years from Francis's conversion. This general assembly was, no doubt, a most necessary refreshment to the brethren, who had wandered over the face of the country, from shore to shore, during all the winter and spring. And henceforward every Pentecost saw the Order re-assemble, at first in little groups, Assisans, Perugians, neighbours from all the towns of Umbria—but growing daily, until thousands came to camp around the little convent, and all the lords and chiefs of the neighbourhood crowded round to gaze at the great festival. This, however, was the work of years.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND ORDER.

In the year 1212, an incident which we can scarcely record with satisfaction happened in the life of Francis. To us, with our changed ideas, it is a matter for the severest censure; and we presume that the devoutest Roman Catholic would scarcely, now-a-days, approve the conduct of any ecclesiastic who encouraged or aided a young girl of seventeen to escape from her father's house, even for the holy purpose of devoting herself to God in a convent. But in the time of Francis no doubt had crossed the minds of any that to shut oneself up in a convent was a holy act; and after his own experience, it is probable he was fully convinced that parental authority in such a case lost all its power, and that to snatch a young soul out of an evil world was the most justifiable of acts. In the town of Assisi lived a noble family called Scifa, a warlike race, well known in the surrounding country. The eldest daughter, Chiara, or Clara, seems to have been one of those devout, spotless, saintly maidens, separate from the world from the cradle, who are the predestined brides of Christ in Catholic families, and of whom examples are never wanting along all the course of history. Her purity, her prayers, her love for the poor, all the perfection of her young existence

—a perfection as nearly absolute as we are capable of imagining, a mixture of saintly innocence with holiness—had already, when she attained her seventeenth year, become known to the little world around her. The mother, a pious gentlewoman, careful of all religious observances, and to whom, according to the legend, it had been intimated, before Clara's birth, that her child would be as a light in the world, brought her up devoutly, and from her earliest age she despised the world with all the visionary fervour of one who was totally unacquainted with it. As she grew up, the fame of Francis was filling the minds of all men, and, as was natural, she longed to see, and consult about her own spiritual condition, the penitent whose labours and sacrifices had made so great an impression upon his contemporaries. Whether this was done in a clandestine manner from the beginning, we are not informed: she went to him accompanied by a friend, says the legend, and he also seems to have visited her; but her biographer in the *Acta Sanctorum* does not hesitate to lay the full responsibility of her first flight from her home upon Francis, "who exhorted her to a contempt of the world, and poured into her ears the sweetness of Christ." "The pious father," says the historian, "sought to lead Clara from a world of darkness;" therefore it is clear that he cannot be exonerated from the blame; though it is very probable that the young penitent had no need of urging on, and was rather restrained than incited by the always wise and temperate Francis: a case most usual with girlish enthusiasts feeling within themselves the impulse of a religious vocation.

But the writers of the *Acta Sanctorum* regard the matter quite otherwise than as one involving blame: they are but too anxious to show fully the part

Francis took in it, evidently considering that the transaction by which a new saint was procured to the Church, and a soul saved from the world, is one of the glories of his life. It was decided between them, after many conferences, which, if not clandestine, were certainly not open, and not at all subject to the opinion of her family, that Palm Sunday should be the day of Clara's consecration to God. In the morning she went with all the town to the Cathedral of Assisi, in the midst of a crowd of fine ladies in their holiday dresses. She was so shy and shamefaced in the self-consciousness of youth, that when the others approached the altar to receive their palms Clara stayed in her place. No doubt the act which she was contemplating, the solemnity that awaited her that very night, and the renunciation she was about to make, had moved the girl, but seventeen years old, out of ordinary composure. But the officiating priest, to whom no doubt the youthful sanctity of this lamb of his flock was well known, descended the steps of the altar and put the palm in her hand. No doubt it was as a message from God to the young creature thus trembling on the edge of her fate.

That same night she stole out of her father's house in the darkness, "with honourable company," says her biographer, and made her way down the hilly road towards the lonely little church of the Portiuncula. She was still dressed in her festival finery with all her pretty maidenly ornaments. At the door of the church she was met by Francis and the brethren, bearing lights, probably with the reference which is always on their lips, to her name: "*Clara nomine, vita clarior, clarissima moribus*,"[1] says Celano.

[1] "She was called Clara" (bright or clear), "her life was brighter, and her character most bright of all."

Here she solemnly gave up "the dregs of Babylon and a wicked world," put aside her ornaments, had her long hair cut off, and received from the hands of Francis the rough brown woollen gown and cord which were to be hereafter all her bravery. It would seem to have been in the middle of the night that this ceremonial took place. The little church streaming light out of all its windows into the external blackness, and the girl with her heart beating, with her long locks falling under the scissors, among that crowd of brown-frocked brethren, some one or two wistful women, servants or dependants, looking on—what a curious mixture of stealth and solemnity, light and darkness, there is in this midnight scene! She had come in the dark, with her attendants, through the fresh spring air and the rustle of the silent woods, escaping like a captive from her father's house. She did not choose, we are told, to use the ordinary door, but cleared with her own hands one which had been blocked up by stones and wood—probably a door unused and partly built up, according to the fashion of the country, that the living might not pass where the dead had gone. When the ceremony was over, and Clara had wrapped her girlish figure in the Franciscan habit, the founder of the Order went out with her again into the night to conduct her to the nearest female convent of the Benedictines, where she could remain with decorum and safety. How strange a night! occupied by these two darkling goings to and from Assisi, and the wonderful change that had taken place in the meantime—from the noble young lady adorned both by art and nature, to young Sister Clara with her short hair, leaving her curls and her jewels ("dregs of Babylon") behind her on the altar! There are few now-a-days who will sympathise with the

secrecy and stealthiness of the flight, or with the part Francis played in it. But it would be hard to refuse a thrill of sympathy to the trembling and excited girl hurried up and down those gloomy roads under cover of the night.

Fifteen days after this event, while Clara still remained at the Benedictine convent, there occurred a painful scene, in which, however, Francis does not seem to have taken any immediate part. A little sister, Agnes, some ten or eleven years old, bound to Clara by that intense, admiring adoration with which a woman-child so often regards an elder maiden, took refuge with her in her retirement. The family had made an ineffectual attempt to recover Clara, but this second loss was more than they could bear. Twelve kinsmen, says the story, marched to the convent-gates to bring back the child, with an amount of violence very unfit, one would imagine, for the occasion, and very unlike the demeanour of Christian knights. But naturally the monkish historian deepens his shadows whenever he touches upon the secular world, and saves all his lights for the cloister. The two girls clung together, wept and prayed in vain ; but that which entreaties could not effect, the prayers of Clara miraculously effected. As they carried off the struggling child down the hill-side, little Agnes suddenly became as lead in their arms, and all their united strength could not lift her over a certain brook that crossed the way. Her uncle, putting forth his arm to strike the child, says the biographer, was suddenly stricken himself with violent pain, so great as to deprive him of all power to stand ; and the result was that Agnes was left half dead upon the roadside, while the discomfited kinsmen took their way home defeated. The child recovered her

strength the moment her face was turned to the convent—and the sisters were reunited. Thus the young Clara's commencement of conventual life was sanctioned by miracle, and her little sister became her first disciple; and so, without premeditation, to suit the necessity of the moment, the second Order of the followers of Francis came into being.

This was strictly in accordance with the ordinary usage of monastic orders. All the existing Rules embraced both men and women, just as every great religious movement affects both; but the application of the new Rule, which was based not only upon individual but corporate poverty, was still more hard as applied to women than it was to men. The brides of Christ were cloistered, and unable to go out and beg their daily bread, as were their brethren; for religious fervour, even at its highest pitch, had not yet conceived the possibility of a young and beautiful girl like Clara going forth publicly to serve the world, and receive from it her humble subsistence. Even Francis, who had so far changed the character of monasticism as to realize the necessity of living, not for himself and his own salvation, but for the succour and salvation of others, had not the boldness to apply this new principle to the young convert whom he had received under his shadow. To Clara and her sisters was given the passive part: theirs it was to support the brethren by their prayers, to stand by and watch, and offer the sacrifice of all things, spending their time in supplications for a world which did not pray for itself, as the brethren spent their lives and strength in preaching and active succour. The women waited, like Elijah, till God should send some raven with the daily morsel which kept them alive to continue their prayers.

This theory is one which has altogether died out in Protestant nations. We have all learned for generations to take it for granted that the life of the convent was a cowardly running away from the perils of ordinary existence—a compulsory innocence, if not an hypocrisy. But very different was the intention of Francis; very different the meaning with which Clara in her youth gave up the world. That sacrifice of all pleasantness, comfort, and enjoyment,—that giving up of love and friends,—that voluntary beggary and renunciation,—was to them the renewed and continual offering upon the altar for the sins of the world. It was Christ's sacrifice over again; not like His one grand redemption, but yet a type after, not before, the event—a repetition, in more precious flesh and blood, of the spotless lambs offered by Israel, which all pointed to the Lamb to come. Clara, too, bent her young head, and annihilated herself, that the world might remember how He made of Himself the one effectual offering. That world took so little heed of its redemption, it was meet that here and there should be some spotless creature taking heed of nothing else for its sake. And how many men and women, for whom Christ died, were there not only in the world, but even about Assisi, who never prayed for themselves! therefore must the poor recluse spend all her life in prayer, weep till she was well-nigh blind, fast till life in her was weakened to the last possibility of existence. Such was the theory of the convent—the soul and essence of the Franciscan Rule: a life like Christ's in the world, not of the world, but yet for the love of the world, enduring all things that men might be saved;—those who could work working, like Him, to save the perishing; those who could but pray, praying like Him.

interceding, pleading, rapt in that ecstasy of communion which wants no words; and both the workers and the supplicants suffering like Him, giving up their own will like Him, subjecting everything, as He did, to the will of God and the benefit of men. As Job offered sacrifices while his children feasted, lest they should have sinned, so the nuns and the friars fasted and prayed while the noisy world went on its way fighting and feasting around them. They might be wrong, even in their first fervour,—for what man can save his brother,—or who, except the all-pure, the Son of God Himself, is in a position to offer offerings for his fellow-men?—but the error, if it was an error, was at least a sublime one, nobler and loftier, and full of a higher meaning, than all the wisdom of the world.

After an interval of waiting among the Benedictines, Clara removed to St. Damian—the church which Francis had first repaired, and which is so closely woven in with his early history—and there lived all the remainder of her life, forty-two years, first abbess of the new Order, and, under him, its foundress. This second branch of the great Franciscan community has been in later days called by her name. The nuns were at first entitled the Poor Ladies of St. Damian; but the title of Poor Clares, or Clarisses, has been more universal. They grew into greatness along with the elder Order, and drew queens and princes within their humble cloister; but have decayed with the decay of their brethren. However, the story of the Poor Clares, as of the Franciscan friars, belongs to a later period, and cannot be entered upon here.

This was the beginning of one of those tender and touching friendships which are to the student of history like green spots in the desert; and which gave

to the man and the woman thus voluntarily separated from all the joys of life a certain human consolation in the midst of their hardships. They can have seen each other but seldom, for it was one of the express stipulations of the Franciscan Rule that the friars should refrain from all society with women, and have only the most sparing and reserved intercourse even with their sisters in religion. And Francis was no priest, nor had he the privilege of hearing confession and directing the spiritual life of his daughter in the faith. But he sent to her to ask enlightenment from her prayers, when any difficulty was in his way. He went to see her when he was in trouble; specially once on his way to Rieti to have an operation performed on his eyes. Once the two friends ate together at a sacramental meal, the pledge and almost the conclusion on earth of that tenderest, most disinterested, and unworldly love which existed between them. That he was sure of her sympathy in all things, of her prayers and spiritual aid, whatsoever he might be doing, wheresoever he might be, no doubt was sweet to Francis in all his labours and trials. As he walked many a weary day past that church of St. Damian, every stone of which was familiar to him, and many laid with his own hands, must not his heart have warmed at thought of the sister within, safe from all conflict with the world, upon whose fellow-feeling he could rely absolutely as man can rely only on woman? The world has jeered at the possibility of such friendships from its earliest age; and yet they have always existed—one of the most exquisite and delicate of earthly ties. Gazing back into that far distance over the graves, not only of those two friends, but of a hundred succeeding generations, a tear of grateful sympathy comes into the student's

eye. He is glad to believe that, all those years, Francis could see in his comings and goings the cloister of Clara; and that this sacred gleam of human fellowship,—love purified of all self-seeking,—tender, visionary, celestial affection, sweetened their solitary lives.

CHAPTER VII.

PROGRESS.

THE year 1212 had been a most eventful one in the life of Francis. He had been able to recognize and identify his Order as rapidly rising in importance, sanctioned by the Pope, though as yet only verbally, and attracting the sympathy and attention of the general Church. His bishop, the Cardinal di San Paolo, and other great ecclesiastics had been moved by the truth and fervour of the man to recognize in him one of those born Reformers who arise now and then in the world. Sister Clara, at St. Damian, and the brethren scattered through all the towns of Umbria, were extending the Order on every side. The common mass of his countrymen were beginning to be penetrated by that quickening influence which, for want of a better title, we call a religious revival; and in all likelihood, though the rule of the third Order was not established for many years after, the feeling which made it necessary had already come into being. Francis had to some degree attained what he had striven after. The first chapter of his monastic life was, as it were, accomplished. His first great difficulties were over; and the community, even were he taken away from it, was strong enough and sufficiently well organized to stand by itself. In these circumstances it was not of rest that he thought. He felt

himself free to indulge a longing which had been in his mind all these years. Now that he had done something for his Master in the world, had preached, and toiled, and spent himself, like his Master, for the benefit of men—might it not be permitted to him to die like his Master, shedding his blood, not involuntarily, but willingly for Christ and mankind. He was thirty years old, drawing near the age at which our Lord had sacrificed His perfect life; and what if His humble servant might in this also imitate Him? It is easy to imagine the fond reasoning, half sublime, half foolish, with which he pursued the analogy. It was not, as with St. Paul, better for the Church that he should remain; for had not he set all things in order, appointed the Guardian for his convent, and a substitute for himself? He had placed Clara in safety; he had no longer any personal affairs to restrain him; and now what hindered that he should follow in the path of the Crusaders, carrying not, like them, war and sword, but his cross and his message of peace from God and goodwill to men?

So far as we can discover, the community made no appeal against this resolution. It was, indeed, too solemn a matter to be opposed by the obedient brethren; and, as his original companions were by this time spread over the country, preaching in different places, it is probable that he was not even exposed to the pain of many partings from his closest and most attached friends. One went with him, whose name is not told us. They set sail most likely from some port of the Adriatic, intending to go to Syria, but were driven by stress of weather upon the opposite shore, upon that coast of Illyria on which Shakspeare lands his shipwrecked maiden: it is

called Sclavonia by the biographers of Francis. Here the pilgrims were left for some time, waiting the sailing of a vessel for Syria; but finding that no ship would leave Illyria that year for the East, and hoping to find more speedy means of making the voyage could he but reach Ancona, Francis endeavoured to get a passage in a vessel bound for that port. He was refused for want of money, not having enough to keep himself and his companion alive on the way. Having confidence, however, as we are told, in the providence of God, the two poor friars hid themselves among the cargo, fearing no hardship for themselves, and not apparently taking into account the possibility of increasing the hardships of others by diminishing the scanty provisions of the crew. What might have been the result of this clandestine addition of two mouths to the number who had to be fed daily in the poor little coasting-vessel, it is impossible to tell, had not a semi-miraculous provision been made, which turned the burden into a benefit. A certain worthy man, who, it may be supposed, had been converted by the preaching of Francis, came down secretly to the ship, and placed a supply of provisions for the use of the poor brethren in the charge of one of the sailors, who was also a man fearing God. The voyage was again a lengthened and troublesome one; and as the ship's stores were exhausted, the charitable supply thus provided for the wandering missionaries sustained the whole crew, when, after much labour in rowing, they at length drew near the Italian shore. The spring, probably, was so far advanced by this time, that Francis thought it expedient to postpone his further journey until after the general Pentecostal Chapter, at which it is evident his presence was important. And accordingly, instead of taking ship

from Ancona, he and his companion returned to Assisi, paying on the way a visit to Rome. He is supposed at this time to have formed a friendship, which lasted all his life, with a noble Roman lady, called Giacobba di Settisoli. And, as he went and came from Ancona to Rome, from Rome to Assisi, through all the populous towns of Central Italy, he preached everywhere, rousing the slumbrous or pre-occupied, with his strange humility of appearance and burning earnestness of utterance. We are told it was a year in which the Order made much progress; many nobles and learned men, as well as simple townsfolk, giving up everything to enrol themselves among the Brothers Minor, the humblest of God's servants.

The early biographers are, except in a few special instances, quite regardless of chronology; and it is only from the careful and minute examination made by the critical Bollandist, who arranges and collates their different works, that we are enabled to form a consistent thread of time and date. According to this learned authority, it was after presiding over the second general Chapter of the Order, for which he had specially returned from Ancona, that Francis set out again upon his travels. Perhaps he had been discouraged by the difficulties in the way; perhaps some vicissitude in the course of the Crusades, more important to contemporaries than to history, prevented him at the moment from carrying out his original intention. But anyhow he changed his destination, though not the meaning of his journey. The idea which now filled his mind was to go to Morocco, in Africa, finally; but, in the meantime, to Spain, on a mission to the Moors, who then held so much Spanish territory, and kept the Christian inhabitants in perpetual conflict. It is impossible to tell what incident

in his unrelated story may have suggested this new idea to the mind of Francis. Perhaps some Spaniard among his increasing followers had brought before him, with the force of an eye-witness, some striking particulars of the struggle; or a thrill of noble impatience with the miserable and long-continued warfare which absorbed the strength of a great nation, and made it comparatively useless in Christendom, had moved his generous, visionary soul. At all events, with a curious evangelical romanticism (if we may use the word), he determined to set out for Spain, to preach to the Miramolin, the sovereign of the Moors, and to follow him, if needful, into his own country. Perhaps something of the self-confidence of a successful preacher, the inevitable belief in his own eloquence, which the humblest of men could scarcely exclude altogether from his mind after such experience as his, mingled with his desire for martyrdom; but, at all events, he was ready to risk martyrdom in whatsoever shape it might approach him.

It is uncertain, and a matter of great difficulty to our Bollandist to decide, whether he went by sea or land, though the latter would seem the most likely; for legendary traces abound of some missionary expedition of his through Lombardy and Piedmont, and parts of France, which is more likely to have occurred at this time than at any other. He went chiefly on foot, though sometimes, in his fatigue, he would mount an ass or mule to shorten the laborious way; and preached wherever he went, making slow progress, and delayed by perpetual attacks of fever, with which, it is said, he had been afflicted before leaving home. He was so eager for his work, so "drunk in spirit" with missionary zeal and earnestness, his biographers say, that as he

trudged along by coast and mountain, he would push on before, unconsciously outstripping the brother who was his companion. Perhaps in the silence, as he wandered on, his eager soul foresaw the possibility of so working upon the hearts of the Moors, as to induce them to abandon their long struggle with Spain, and give peace to that distracted country; for to the simple and visionary mind at all times, and how much more in the thirteenth century, such a sudden departure from long-cherished policy and purpose was not even unlikely, any more than any other miracle; or perhaps the thought of sealing his own confession upon the point of a Moorish lance gave him a certain feverish impetuosity. According to tradition, he made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, travelled into Lusitania, and traversed the whole kingdom of Arragon, though of all this there is no certain information, but only the warrant of legend. One thing sure, however, is that he never reached the Moors, but, driven back by illness, losing the time in which he could work, and called at length by the approach of another Chapter at the Portiuncula, once more returned home, it would appear in the spring of the year 1214, to the charge of his original flock and the cares of the Order.

These two aimless journeys break in somewhat strangely upon the current of his life; but it is necessary to remember that such journeys were, in reality, the grand object of the Brotherhood; that all the other preachers of the Order were, like Francis, dispersed abroad upon missionary expeditions, though he, as their leader, was the first to penetrate into the world outside the bounds of Italy; and that though he did not achieve, in either case, the final object of his mission, yet that, without doubt, its secondary object—

that of preaching by the way wherever he went, and sowing everywhere the seeds of truth—an object much more important than any visionary mission to the Moors—was fully accomplished. It was not Francis only who hastened home across the Alpine heights, as quickly as fever, and weakness, and daily privations would let him; but all the other pairs of brown-robed brethren, walking, as Dante tells us, one behind and one before, in a silence full of thought and prayer, gathered in from all the Italian coasts, from the borders of adjacent countries, to the little centre on the slopes of Apennine. None of the rest seem, as yet, to have gone so far as their leader had done: he was the pioneer, treading first the dangerous way. But from their shorter journeys, from all the length and breadth of Italy, with converts and news of converts, and many an experience to add to the growing story, they came back to the hive which had sent them forth.

It would appear to have been about this time that Francis made the acquaintance of the Cardinal Ugolino, Bishop of Ostia, who became afterwards the first protector of the Order. He was the Pope's legate in Florence, where, if we may exercise our own judgment in the midst of all the uncertainty of dates, and the still greater uncertainty of criticism, Francis had gone with the intention of making a second journey into Gaul, after the Chapter of 1214, for which he had returned. The Cardinal—who had heard a great deal of him, and who probably had seen with interest the visionary Spouse of Poverty, when, five years before, he made his sudden appearance before Pope Innocent to ask the Papal authority for his Order—received him now with joy, and offered his protection and counsel in everything that Francis might desire.

asking in return the prayers of the brethren. That this gracious offer of friendship (for Ugolino stood in the very first rank of ecclesiastical eminence, the nephew of Pope Innocent, and himself in his turn destined to fill the Holy See) should be met with full confidence on the side of the humble leader of the Minors, is very natural. And it is evident that the full sympathy without which no friendship can last, existed between these two, so unlike in circumstances—the prince of the Church in his Florentine palace, invested with an authority and influence greater than that of any imperial ambassador, and the barefooted, unlearned, penniless Francis, worn by sickness and toil. The Rule of the Order was still formally unconfirmed, and nothing can be more probable than that Ugolino counselled his friend, instead of setting out again upon journeys which reduced his strength to the last degree, and put his life in peril, to remain in Italy, and set his mind to the legal establishment of his Order—a matter more fundamentally important than the missionary work, which he could trust to his brethren. A council was to be held in Rome in the following year, the fourth great Lateran Council, and no better opportunity could be for the final settlement of this important piece of business. Only Francis in his own person could do this—while Bernard, and Philip, and Elias, and Egidio, and many more besides, could carry on the missionary work, going further and further afield in their zeal and obedience, and bringing back, Pentecost after Pentecost, tidings of their labours and success. We can but believe that Francis yielded to this or similar reasoning, for it is certain that for some years after he remained in Italy. The next Pentecost after the beginning of this friendship, Cardinal Ugolino went out to the little

monastery to celebrate with them their yearly festival. He was met by the brethren in procession, and conducted to the church, where he preached a sermon to the assembled Chapter, and celebrated Mass—Francis, in his humility, who was no priest nor thought himself worthy to touch the sacred mysteries, chanting the gospel. Thus the friendship was sealed; and it continued unbroken until death made that breach which, let us trust, is but a temporary interruption to bonds which are in reality beyond its power.

In the next year occurred the fourth great Lateran Council. It was one of the last public events in the life of the great Pope Innocent; and here for a time met, or at least were visible in the same place and almost in the same circumstances, the two men who, beyond all others then living in Christendom, were most important in the history of Christianity—Francis, the apostle of Italy, and a Spanish priest called Dominic Gonzago, who had just come from Spain possessed by an equal enthusiasm for the cause of Christ and the salvation of man. The appearance of two such men in the same sphere at one and the same moment, was of itself enough to signalize a great era. We who, with all the enlightenment of six additional centuries, can look back and see the Inquisition grimly shadowing from under the robes of the Spanish priest, and hordes of mendicant friars, privileged and impudent beggars, appearing behind the genial countenance of Francis, may perceive how much of evil mixed with the good, and how the enemy of all truth had cunningly mixed the seed of the tares with that of the wheat. But in their own day, while the first fervour of their mission was upon them, the man would have been forecasting indeed who could have seen anything but good in the apostolic zeal of Dominic and of Francis.

We have no space to spare for any narrative of the labours of the Spaniard, who was a man of learning as well as of zeal, and who in the cloisters of Castile had been seized with an inspiration similar to, yet differing from, that of the prophet of Assisi. He too aimed at spreading a profounder knowledge of the truth through the world by means of preaching; but the preaching was different, the spirit different—as different as the instincts of the subtle, polemical, ecclesiastical mind are from the spontaneous movements of the simple lover of God and man.

The preaching of Francis and his brethren was purely evangelical; they carried the peace of God, the love of God, the mysterious and awful story of the Passion, with its results of universal pardon and remission of sins, to all the homely folk immersed in ordinary business, who had little time to spare for niceties of doctrine. But the Dominicans from the beginning were armed with theological sword and shield: they were the dogs of the Church (Dominicani, the Lord's watch-dogs, according to the play upon words so common among monkish writers) fighting the heretical wolves, and her guard of defence to drive off all assault of evil doctrine. Both these extraordinary men, the one in his ragged tunic, clad like the shepherds in the fields, the other in the dignified costume of a priest, met each other in the narrow Roman streets, and mounted together the steps of the Lateran, but, so far as can be made out, were not positively known to each other until the following year. The errand of Dominic to the Council was to seek the necessary permission for founding a new Order; that of Francis, to obtain some sort of formal recognition of the order already verbally approved by Pope Innocent in the year 1209. Ere either of these

applicants appeared before the Council, a resolution had been come to by the assembled fathers that no new religious Rule was now to be instituted ; but that any one desirous of founding a new Order should be commanded to choose among the Rules already in existence. Dominic was sent back to his disciples in Spain with this command. But Francis held a different position. His Rule had been already approved, and had, since its first promulgation, proved itself in the only satisfactory way, by gathering to itself many adherents, and by effecting real work in the world ; and the Pope, when he first received him, six years before, had authorized him to return again. "When God has multiplied you in numbers and grace," he had said, according to Celano," come back to me with joy, and I will grant to you greater things." It is clear, too, that at their first meeting Innocent had been moved by the evangelical simplicity and fervour of the man who accepted the life and example of Christ as his most literal rule ; and Francis had the friendship of Ugolino to back him, and that of his first friend, the Cardinal di San Paolo ; and had laboured in Italy, under the eyes of the Roman court, where his sanctity and earnestness, as well as the growing success of his work, could not fail of appreciation. We are told, accordingly, though not by the early biographers, yet by several chroniclers of a proximate date—evidence which the critical and careful Bollandist thinks worthy of credit—that the Rule of the Frati Minores was publicly sanctioned by Innocent at this council. It was not even now confirmed by a Bull, as was afterwards done by Innocent's successor. But a public sanction was given, with the consent of the assembled fathers ; a recognition which sufficed for the complete establishment of the Order in Italy at least, though not

as becomes afterwards apparent in the more distant regions, which were out of reach and immediate communication with Rome.

The Chapter held at the ensuing Pentecost, which fell in the month of June, was the first for which letters of convocation had to be sent forth. This is of itself a sign of the increase of the Order. Up to this time, the brethren had been sufficiently few in number to return periodically from their labours with the ease of children coming home; but now strangers, nobles and learned men, had come into the brotherhood. New communities had begun to rise in distant places, and from the little Portiuncula the summons went forth with a certain novel, simple dignity. It is probable that Cardinal Ugolino was present at this as at many other Chapters of the Order, giving it his countenance; and by this time, no doubt, something of the excitement which a few years later moved the whole surrounding country in respect to the yearly assembly had come into existence. It was a time of jubilee: there was the Papal sanction, for the first time publicly proclaimed, to make glad the hearts of the brethren. The Order had grown: a promise of greatness and progress was in the very air. And the brethren in their poverty, and amid all their toils and trials and the hard life habitual to them, must have paused with a sudden, unusual gleam of human content, and ate their bread, which was the alms of the faithful, with thankful hearts, and looked after a year's interval upon the familiar faces, under that genial Italian sky, which made it almost pleasant to sleep upon the bare turf with a cool stone for a pillow. Their hardships would scarcely count as hardships at such a moment. To the elder brethren the sweet sense of home-coming and

rest, and the pleasure of reunion, must have gone far to make up for many of the bitternesses of the way; and to the new converts there was the flush of early enthusiasm, the joy of seeing and sharing in the counsels of the founder, and learning all the details, so interesting to members of any society, of its first origin and early struggles. There was no talk of secular business among them, says the simple record; and as Francis passed from group to group, it was to utter the simplest friendly counsel, the tenderest words of encouragement. They had hard work and leagues of weary journeys before them; they had to encounter the flouts and scorn and angry opposition of many; they had to strive against the weariness and disgusts of the flesh; but it is easy to imagine that, at such a moment of rest, the toil would seem easy, and the recompense more and more sweet.

It is supposed to be in the following year that Dominic and Francis met. Their meeting, however, is not referred to in the early biographies of Francis, but only in those of his great contemporary. There we are told that Dominic, praying in a church in Rome, saw, in a vision, our Lord rise from the right hand of the Father in wrath, wearied at last with the contradiction of sinners, with a terrible aspect and three lances in his hand, each one of which was to destroy from the face of the earth a distinct class of offenders. But while the dreamer gazed at this awful spectacle, the Virgin Mother arose and pleaded for the world, declaring that she had two faithful servants whom she was about to send into it to bring sinners to the feet of the Saviour; one of these was Dominic himself; the other was a poor man, meanly clad, whom he had never seen before. This vision came to the devout Spaniard, according to the legend, during the

night which he spent, as he was wont, in a church, in prayer. Next morning, while he mused on the dream which had been sent to him, his eye fell all at once upon a stranger in a brown tunic, of aspect as humble and modest as his garb, coming into the same church to pray. Dominic at once ran to him, fell on his neck, and, saluting him with a kiss, cried, "Thou art my companion: thy work and mine is the same. If we stand by each other, nothing can prevail against us." "And they were made one heart and one soul in the Lord," writes the chronicler. We are by this time so painfully enlightened as to the after-history of the Dominicans and Franciscans and their quarrels, that this story comes to us like the bit of special pleading which it is possible it was. Perhaps some brother, wiser than the rest, by some pious amplification of details or embodiment of the suggestion conveyed in the mere fact of their meeting, framed this account of a friendship, miraculous and everlasting, between the two apostles, such as might touch the hearts of the multitudes who bore their respective names. In the nineteenth century, it is our temptation to explain everything wonderful in this way. But yet the two were God's instruments to work a very great and real reformation in the world, and to quicken true religion over a great part of Christendom; and such a dream embodies like a parable their office and mutual relations. Dominic, as we shall see later, is reported in the *Fioretti* to have been present at a great Chapter of the Minors a few years later, where his admiration of, and friendship for, his brother in arms were expressed in enthusiastic terms.

This is the only public incident which we can glean out of the silent years between 1214 and 1219, during which time Francis remained in Italy. The narrative

is, however, rich with a hundred beautiful legendary stories of his tender-heartedness and warm, natural eloquence—the kindness, humanity, and beautiful courtesy of his character. These are heaped upon us without any attempt at chronology. And we must treat them in the same fashion, offering them to the reader in a mass, with all the beautiful evidences of character that appear in them, and all the more vulgar amplitude of miracle. Of Francis, as of many other mediæval saints, it is safe to say that his miracles must have exceeded in number a hundredfold the miracles of Scripture, and that indeed the mind of his time was disappointed if the saint took any journey, or made any movement, without some marvellous issue. His hair, the worn-out rope he had used as a girdle, the bit of paper on which he had written a devotional sentence, all were as potent as his own word or touch, and did whatever it was required they should do, from comforting a troubled mind to repairing a broken wall. The hasty critic who looks at the man across all these centuries through the mist and maze of prodigy that surrounds him, is apt to turn away with a certain contempt, as if our saint were as fabulous as no doubt many of these stories are, or as if Francis himself had given them forth, and rested his claims to our consideration upon so shadowy and common-place a basis. But nothing can be further from the truth than this superficial conception. It was impossible, in that primitive age, to dissociate the idea of miracle from that of special sanctity; but the brethren of Francis, his Three Companions, men trained in his own manner of thought, and accustomed to his ways, tell us, as we have seen, in the very preface of their work, that they will not be content to narrate miracles only, since miracles "do not make holiness,

but only display it." We have refrained, up to this moment, from quoting the wonders which have grown around his life ; but to omit them would be to leave out the most characteristic aspect of his time. And we trust the reader is sufficiently in sympathy with the simple, tender, heroic, visionary, yet literal nature of the man to see how naturally these legends have developed, in some cases, out of his own exceptionally sympathetic character, and how in others there is a hidden soul of meaning such as the vulgar miss, yet are vaguely moved by, without knowing why. We pause accordingly in the thread of history to open as far as we are able the narrow convent doors, and pull aside the branches in the wood still heavy with dew, and clear the mist of ages from those mountain roads and historic cities, which Francis traversed, where he lived, and where he prayed.

CHAPTER VIII.

MIRACLES AND WONDERS.

THE first thing to be considered in this curious aspect of the life of Francis is his own character. It may be said that the healing of the sick, and many other of the miraculous acts imputed to him, are precisely such as are imputed to all saints, without an attempt at any special characteristic distinction; but, on further investigation, there will be seen to be a certain individuality possessed by few others in the story of his "acts." He was a man overflowing with sympathy for man and beast—for God's creatures—wherever and howsoever he encountered them. Not only was every man his brother, but every animal—the sheep in the fields, the birds in the branches, the brother-ass on which he rode, the sister-bees who took refuge in his kind protection. He was the friend of everything that suffered or rejoiced; no emotion went beyond his sympathy; his heart rose to see the gladness of nature, and melted over the distresses of the smallest and meanest creature on the face of the earth. And by this divine right of nature, everything trusted in him. The magnetism of the heart, that power which nobody can define, but which it is impossible to ignore, surrounded him like a special atmosphere. That sense of security and sympathy which, we all acknowledge, draws the nobler domestic animals, horses and dogs, to

those who like them, embraced with Francis a wider circle, for he loved everything that had life—

> "He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all."

Such was the unconscious creed of the prophet of Assisi, and there cannot be any doubt that he must have possessed in an almost unexampled degree the power of attracting all creatures to him. That there are real possessors of such a gift, without any claim to miraculous influence, is certain. For example, Madame Sand, one of the most famous of living French authors, declares herself to possess this power over birds, and describes it as hereditary in her family; while there are also well-known instances of power over horses, and over wild beasts of almost every description. With Francis the sympathetic power was universal: he meant no harm on his own part, and had none of that timidity which most of us are moved by in the presence of the most timid of God's creatures—that fear that they must misapprehend our intentions and set us down as enemies in disguise, which makes our steps stealthy, and our movements treacherous, among the little birds and wild creatures of the woods and fields. We cannot divest ourselves of the feeling that they must suspect us. But Francis had no such feeling; his sense of brotherhood was real, not fictitious; he had the courage of good intention, feared nothing, and was not feared. It is difficult to know where to begin in the many stories of this description. We can but select at hazard some of those which are the most significant of the sympathetic mind, open to all the influences of nature, with which we have to deal. Here is an oft-repeated incident:—

"The blessed Francis, returning from beyond the sea, was travelling through the marches of Venice, and heard a vast multitude of birds singing among the bushes. And when he saw them he said to his companions, 'Our sisters, the birds, are praising their Maker. Let us then go into their midst and sing to the Lord the Canonical Hours.' And when they had gone into their midst the birds moved not from the place; but as on account of their chirping and twittering the brethren were not able to hear each other, the holy man turned to the birds and said—'Sisters, cease your song until we have rendered our bounden praise to God.' And they at once were silent, and when the praises were finished resumed their song."

On another occasion, when he was preaching in the town of Alvia, the swallows, with their perpetual twittering, incommoded the audience. Francis had gone up to a high piece of ground, that he might be seen by all, and had asked for silence from the assembled people. But the birds were flitting all about in airy circles, making their nests, chirping and calling to each other overhead in the blue heaven of the Italian sky. When it became apparent that these sweet disturbers of the peace prevented their human companions from hearing the word of God, the preacher turned and courteously saluted the little nest-builders. "My sisters," he said, "it is now time that I should speak. Since you have had your say, listen now in your turn to the word of God, and be silent till the sermon is finished." It is needless to add that he was perfectly obeyed. The scene is one to charm a painter:—the little piazza of the town among the hills; the exquisite spring of Italy moving all hearts; the silent groups all about, watching every movement of the far-famed saint; and the swallows in their circles skimming over all those dark, earnest faces, touching the cathedral roof, the quaint houses,

every point of vantage, filling the soft air with the twitter of life and movement. If it is hard to our nineteenth-century imagination to realize their absolute obedience to his request, it is not hard to realize at least the outward setting of the scene, nor to acknowledge that by times the birds are silent, as if by mutual consent, and that, be it by the absorbed attention of the bystanders, be it by the force of strong emotion, setting aside all external sounds and sights, such moments of stillness in the midst of the glow and glory of a shining day are within the consciousness of all.

Other evidences of the sense of safety which the very presence of so holy and kind a soul diffused around him abound in the early biographies. One day, at the village of Gubbio, a live leveret was brought to him, probably as part of his day's provision. When he saw the little creature, his gentle heart was moved to pity. "Little brother leveret, come to me," he said. "Why hast thou let thyself be taken?" The trembling animal immediately escaped out of the hands of the brother who held it, and fled to Francis, taking refuge in the folds of his gown. From this shelter he disentangled it, set it free on the ground, and, with quaint formality, gave it leave to depart; but it returned to its protector, nestling to him, until he sent it tenderly away, by the hands of the astonished brother who had brought it, into the adjoining wood. The same story is told of a wild rabbit which took refuge with him in an island on the lake of Perugia. "It still returned into the father's bosom, as if it had some hidden sense of the pitifulness of his heart," says the poetic narrative of Bonaventura. Such stories as these are evidences at least of the popular wonder and admiration for a tender-heartedness little common to

the time; and it is not difficult to imagine how great an effect this universal, all-reaching, all-considering sympathy must have had on a cruel primitive age, used to slaughter and destruction on all sides, careless of life, or blood, or suffering. In this, as in other matters, Francis was a sign to his time.

But there is another sentiment, still more beautiful and touching, which breathes through many of these quaint miraculous tales. It is the noble conception of a redeemed world, a universe all pervaded by the sense of the Creator's presence and the Saviour's love. Men then, as now, were sadly unsatisfactory beings to have had so much love and care lavished upon them; and the visionaries of that rude age were as children—full of sweet unspeakable fancies, and that strange power of inspiring the outside world with their own simple, sublime fulness of thought and feeling which is the inheritance of babes. They had enough and to spare in themselves to fill up all those blanks which the vulgar eye sees in creation. They could not realize the possibility of merely animal life without consciousness, without some fashion of intellectual or emotional existence; and were not aware of so great a gap between themselves and the so-called lower creatures as we are. It is sometimes hard enough now to understand how a stony-hearted, unpitying, unloving, faithless man can yet be dearer to his Creator than an honest, patient, faithful, all-enduring animal; but in the time of Francis the wonder was still greater. He turned, sick at heart, from the perpetual strife and contention of his time, from fighting cities, rapacious nobles, a whole world of blood and oppression, and, with an unspeakable relief, heard the gentle birds singing in the woods, the harmless creatures rustling among the trees. Were all these inno-

cent beings out of the limits of God's covenant? Were they made for no use but that of an hour's, or a day's, or a year's pleasure, with cruel death at the end? Ah no: they were God's harmless, voiceless folk, who knew His name, and sang His praises, and kept up the perpetual adoration, before even Piety had bethought itself of that unceasing service. This thought runs through the whole theory of existence as recognized by Francis and men of like mind. They could not doubt that where God had put life, He had also put the consciousness of Himself. They spoke another tongue—those inarticulate races whose life was hidden in Christ; but what was there to hinder that in simple speech of man, who was their natural head, they should recognize the great Name, and do their fluttering, innocent homage with a fulness, a simplicity, a tender, childish devotion which was needed to fill up the harmonies of worship? It is evident that Francis felt himself justified in addressing this spiritual consciousness in every living thing. He was their superior in the economy of Providence; they could not answer him in speech, but they could by obedience: and God was the Father, the Preserver, the conscious Head of all. In this confidence the gentle seer moved about a world all peopled with his brethren, not only putting his benign commands upon them, but endeavouring after their edification with a certain ineffable, beautiful wise-foolishness, as our children do by instinct, as an angel might do by insight superior to ours. Here is one of many instances of this sense of brotherhood with all the creatures of God:—

"For when once he was seated in a little boat on the lake of Reiti, near a certain port, a fisherman taking a large

fish, which is called commonly a tench, in his devotion brought it to him. And he taking it kindly and cheerfully, began to call it by the name of brother, and putting it in the water out of the boat began devoutly to bless the name of God; and all the while that he continued in prayer the fish, playing in the water near the boat, departed not from the spot in which he had been placed, until, the prayer being finished, the saint of God gave him leave to depart. For thus the glorious Father Francis, walking in the way of obedience and perfect subjection to the Divine will, obtained great honour from God in the obedience of His creatures."

Of other anecdotes, in which no thread of miracle mixes, respecting his tenderness for the inferior creatures there are many. Lambs, for instance, were the special objects of his regard. On one occasion, while walking silently along the road on one of his many journeys, he saw a single little sheep humbly feeding in the midst of a flock of goats. When Francis saw it, his heart was moved, and the tears of sudden feeling came to his eyes. He called Brother Paul, who was his companion, to look at the sight, in the overflowing of his heart. It was like our Lord among the Pharisees and high priests, he thought; and he could not bear to leave that emblem of his Master in the midst of the bearded flock. But the poor travellers had nothing to offer as the price of it, except the brown gowns they wore. As they stood wistful in the way, a merchant coming up, and hearing their difficulty, and the longing of Francis to rescue the little animal, bought it and presented it to him. It was near the city of Orsino, where he was going to preach, and he resumed his journey with joy and thanks, leading with him the white lamb that was like his Lord. The bishop, as was not surprising, wondered much at this unusual addition to the party; but

Francis made his little companion the subject of his discourse, and so set forth the divine story by means of that living type, that every heart was moved. When, however, they had got as far as San Severino on their further way, the lamb became something of a burden to the travellers, and was finally left at a convent with a community of sisters, who received the charge of it with joy. Some time after, the sisters sent to the saint, by the hands of the brethren who attended the Chapter at the Portiuncula, a gown made of its wool, which he received with simple delight. On another occasion he bought with his own mantle two lambs, which were being carried to the slaughter. At home, in the Portiuncula, a lamb was one of his daily companions. "The holy man taught it that it should always praise God, and give no offence to the brethren," says the simple narrative. Another lamb he gave to his friend in Rome, Giacobba di Settesoli, and of this wonderful little animal it is reported that it would push the lady with its horns, and wake her by its bleating, when she was late of getting up to go to church. Such miraculous attending circumstances naturally grew about the simple fact in an age of wonders; but the fond and reverent fancy of the servant of God, who could not bear to leave in want or suffering a creature which had been taken as a type of his Lord, is more touching than any miracle.

We will add but one other story of his influence upon the animal creation, and it is one which requires, let us allow, a still stronger faith than any of the others. It is impossible now to say out of what simple circumstances this miraculous tale may have arisen. It is suggested by some that the real wolf thus tamed was a noted robber of the hills, called Lupo, whom Francis subdued, and brought within the blessed restraint of his own Order—though this

is an interpretation which, for our own part, we are somewhat unwilling to receive.

"At the time when St. Francis was sojourning in the city of Gubbio, there appeared in the country-side a wolf of enormous size, terrible and fierce, which devoured not only animals, but men even, insomuch that all the citizens stood in great fear, for oft-times it approached the city; and all went armed when they went forth of the city, as if they were going to battle, but no man was strong enough to defend himself against the beast, when alone. And through fear of this wolf, matters were come to such a pass that none dared go forth of the town. Wherefore, St. Francis, having compassion on the men of the land, determined to go out and seek this wolf, although the citizens in no way persuaded him to it; and making over himself the sign of the most holy cross, he went forth of the town with his companions, placing all his trust in God. And when the others hesitated to go further, St. Francis took the way towards the place where the wolf was. And behold, in the sight of many citizens who had come to see so great a miracle, the said wolf made towards St. Francis with open mouth; and drawing near to him, St. Francis made over him the sign of the most holy cross, and called him, and spoke thus to him:—'Come hither, Brother Wolf: I command thee in Christ's behalf, that thou do no evil to me nor to any one.' Wondrous sight! as soon as St. Francis had made the sign of the cross, the dread wolf closed his mouth, and stayed his course: he came gently like a lamb, and cast himself at St. Francis's feet to lie down. And then St. Francis spoke thus to him:—'Brother Wolf, thou hast done much damage in these parts, and great evil, spoiling and slaying the creatures of God without His leave; and not only hast thou slain and devoured beasts, but hast dared to slay men, made in the image of God: wherefore thou art worthy of the gallows, as a robber and most wicked murderer; and all men cry out and murmur against thee, and all this land is thy enemy. But I wish, Brother Wolf, to make peace between thee and them; therefore vex them no more, and they will pardon thee all thy past offences, and neither dogs nor men will chase thee any more.' And when these words were said, the wolf, with gestures of body, tail, and eyes, and with head

bowed, showed that he accepted what St. Francis said, and would observe it. Thereupon St. Francis again said: 'Brother Wolf, since it is thy pleasure to make and to observe this peace, I promise thee I will cause that food be given thee constantly, so long as thou shalt live, by the men of this town, so that thou mayst suffer no more from hunger; for well I know, that through hunger hast thou done all wickedness. But since I obtain for thee this favour, I will, Brother Wolf, that thou promise me that thou wilt harm neither man nor beast: promisest thou me this?' And the wolf, with head bowed, made evident sign that he promised. And St. Francis thus spake: 'Brother Wolf, I will that thou give me pledge of this promise, that I may be well assured of it:' and St. Francis stretching forth his hand to take his pledge, the wolf raised his right fore-foot, and tamely placed it in the hand of St. Francis, giving him such sign of good faith as he was able. And then St. Francis said, 'Brother Wolf, I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, that thou come now with me, doubting nothing, and let us go to confirm this peace in the name of God;' and the wolf obediently went with him like a gentle lamb, at which all the citizens, when they saw it, marvelled greatly. And quickly this news is known throughout all the city; at which all, men and women, great and small, young and old, hurry to the piazza to see the wolf with St. Francis. And when the people were all assembled, St. Francis arose to preach to them, saying, among other things, how for their sins God had permitted such misery and ruin; and how far more to be feared is hell fire, which may last for ever, to the lost, than the rage of the wolf, which can slay but the body; how greatly, then, should we fear the mouth of hell, when so great a multitude were kept in fear and trembling for the mouth of one small animal! "Turn, then, dearest brethren, to God, and do fit penance for your sins, and God will save you from the wolf of the present time, and from hell fire of the world to come.' And when the sermon was finished, St. Francis said, 'Hearken, dear brethren, Brother Wolf, who is here before you, has promised me, and of it given me a pledge, that he will make peace with you, and never injure you in any way, if ye promise to give him day by day what is needful; and I will be surety for him that this agreement of peace he shall surely observe.' Thereupon all the people, with one voice, promised to give him his daily food. And St

Francis, before them all, said to the wolf, 'And thou, Brother Wolf, dost thou promise to observe to these the agreement of peace, that thou wilt do no harm to man, or beast, or any creature?' And the wolf bended himself, and bowed his head, and with gentle gestures of his body, tail, and ears showed, as far as he was able, his wish to keep for them the whole agreement. Said St. Francis, 'Brother Wolf, I will, that as thou hast given me pledge of this promise without the gate, so before all the people thou shouldest give me pledge of thy promise, and that thou cheat me not of my promise and suretyship which I have given for thee.' Then the wolf, raising his right foot, placed it in the hand of St. Francis, from which action, and from those already described, so great a joy and wonder was there among the people—contemplating the devotion of the saint, the novelty of the miracle, and the peace thus secured with the wolf—that all began to cry to heaven, praising and blessing God, that had sent them St. Francis, who, by his merit, had saved them from the jaws of the cruel beast. And afterwards the said wolf lived two years in Gubbio, and went tamely amid the houses, from door to door, harming and being harmed by none, and was kindly nourished by the people; and as he went thus from house to house not a dog would ever wag his tongue against him. Lastly, after two years, Brother Wolf died of old age, at which the citizens were sore sorrowful, because seeing him thus passing gently through the city they were better reminded of the virtue and saintliness of St. Francis."

The reader will perceive that the purpose of Francis here separates itself from that of the legend: the aim of the latter is to enlarge and swell out the wonderful details of the saint's miraculous power over one of the cruellest and least persuasible of animals; whereas he himself takes the beast, as he did the lamb, over whose innocent head he preached at Orsino, as a means of increasing the effect of his discourse. "The flames of hell are more dangerous than the rage of the wolf," he says, pointing his moral by the sight of the fierce creature which he led. This curious dramatic effect, which must have been most power-

ful with his audience, as it would be at the present day with such an assembly, is not consonant with the idea of the brigand Lupo; but it shows very clearly how the popular imagination adopts the details of any memorable incident, making that first which should be second. How he brought the wolf after him to the piazza of Agobio, is a different question; but the story strikes us more as that of a bold and successful attempt to move the popular mind, teaching it by type and symbol, moving it by the great powers of wonder and terror and awe, striking the lesson home with the sudden, sharp distinctness of tragedy, than as the account of a miracle. What more vivid image of spiritual destruction, and the unseen, malignant powers of hell, always on the watch to seize the soul, than this rapacious beast, with its gleaming, stealthy gaze, licking its black lips, ready, as the terrified populace must have felt, but for the influence of the saint and the fear of the multitude, to murder and ravage? A symbol more effective could not have been found; and it must be remembered that Francis felt himself free to make use of any symbol or argument which could most certainly move his audience: he was bound by none of the decorums of pulpit eloquence. His text was as likely to be a popular rhyme as a verse from the Vulgate, and, in place of the swelling climaxes of monkish oratory, there was no reason why the meekness of the milk-white lamb, the gleaming eyes of the subdued wolf, should not point his exhortations. Such types were perfectly in character with the tender beseechings of the courteous apostle, and with the fiery, overwhelming eloquence of the prophet of God.

We will not enlarge upon the ordinary miracles common to all the saints of the calendar in which

the story abounds ; how he cast out devils, made the distorted straight, healed the paralytic, gave sight to the blind, and, in short, did everything which the mediæval imagination required a saint to do. This is not the place to discuss such wonders, nor can we enter into the question how far the influence of a man so sympathetic, so serene, and so blameless, possessed with the fullest faith in miraculous power, as was everybody surrounding him, might have been effectual to work certain miracles. It was as much the fashion of his age to believe, as it is of ours to discredit, all such deviations from the ordinary laws of nature. Supernatural power was, in short, to the mind of the thirteenth century, a more likely and obvious agency than any other for the accomplishment of anything that presented difficulties to the ordinary eye. And the meeting of a sick man full of the expectation of being cured by miracle, and of a saint equally certain of being able to effect the cure, is one of which we have no experience, and are consequently unable to judge of ; but it is impossible not to feel that so long as human nature is made up of body and soul, with all their marvellous power of action upon each other, there are possibilities involved in such a meeting which do not exist now-a-days, and which are not to be arbitrarily concluded upon. The question, however, is one which demands other powers, and a greater amount of space and study than any which can be brought to bear upon it here. Besides the anecdotes recorded above which are characteristic not of saints in general, but of Francis in particular, there are other incidents full of poetic beauty, such as might naturally gather about the life of a man who touched the popular imagination deeply, and which the reader may accept

or not as wonders, but must admire as the most touching demonstration of natural homage to a character so beautiful, and a life so free from stain.

As he travelled, one evening, by the borders of the Po, night overtook him on the way. It is, we cannot but observe, *on the way*, that everything befalls him. His life is but a record of journeys, long, silent walks from one place to another, walks which are enlivened by the tender love of nature which is always manifest in his visionary eyes, and during the course of which he spies the lamb among the flock, and steps aside now and then to say his Hours among the singing-birds, or make his gentle exhortation to them, dismissing his little sisters with a blessing. There is always an out-of-door sensation about the picture—the woods rustling, the soft air blowing, the light striking on tower and tree. In short, to be plainly intelligible, there should be an itinerary of all those winding ways through the plains of Umbria, and up the slopes of Apennine, and across the lovely breadth of Italy—by ancient town and rude village, and the white-walled convents with their sunny gardens, and the great castles that awe the neighbourhood. We should pause to note where the big oak threw its welcome shelter, and where the wayfarer, always courteous, bade the ants depart; where the grey sweet olive-orchards subdued all brighter tones about them; where the countryman came out of his quaint farm-steading and saddled his ass for the man of God; where a cool half-ruined church by the wayside gave shelter to the brethren; and where at their journey's end they climbed the rugged streets, and came out upon the high piazza, all the population flocking out after them to hear and see. All these scenes should be painted in broadly on the canvas which holds the figure of

Francis, for among them, and not under the shelter of any roof, was his life spent ; but in the meantime we resume our tale :

He was overtaken by night, he and his companion, on the borders of the Po. The road was dark and dangerous, the river full and overflowing. At some places it had flooded the country round, and at some the banks were broken and dangerous. The brother who accompanied Francis was seized with alarm as the darkness closed around them. "Father, pray that we may be delivered from this danger," he cried, pressing close to the skirts of his leader. But it was a cheerful voice that answered him out of that intense sudden gloom which falls like a curtain, without the interposition of our sweet lingering northern twilight, upon the end of an Italian day. "God is powerful," said Francis, in his serene tones : "if it shall please His most sweet mercy, He will dispel the darkness, and bestow upon us the blessing of light." He had scarcely spoken the words when light shone round them suddenly from heaven, revealing not only the gloomy river and dangerous path, but the soft undulations of the surrounding country, and in the distance the hospice to which they were bound. Then the solitary wayfarers, "directed in body and comforted in soul," lifted up their voices in familiar song. "They travelled on for a long distance, singing praises to God." It must be an insensible heart which could examine too minutely into the soft glow of miraculous light which encloses these two humble figures, with Po running dark and dangerous at their feet, and their hearts and voices praising God in the middle of the silent night.

The other wonders which we have still to quote have something yet more touching and sacred in them.

and we pause with a sense that here we are describing rather those dealings of God with a single soul, which are meant, like all that is most precious in personal love, not for the world, but for the one in all the world to whom they are the sweetest of individual consolations. Francis was at one of those little convents among the hills, called hermitages, lying ill, probably of one of his many attacks of fever. He was very weak and weary in the lassitude left by that oft-recurring malady which haunts the Italian plains, and in his feebleness he asked for a cup of wine. But the lover of Poverty was in her house, where neither wine nor savoury food was to be had. The wistful brethren had to bring him word that there was none to give him. Then he asked for water, which, when it was brought to him, he blessed, making over it the sign of the cross. "Then," says Bonaventura, "that which had been pure water was changed into good wine, and what the poverty of the desert place could not afford was obtained by the purity of the holy man." He had no sooner tasted this celestial cup than his strength was suddenly restored. The story is too beautiful to want any comment of ours. But there is surely something in this cheerful content and holy blessing which could make sacramental wine out of the merest water ever drawn from earthly well.

On another occasion, when weak and worn probably by the same cause, there came upon him a longing to hear some music. He had loved it from his earliest days, and it was a necessity to his poetic nature; but probably he was in no case to sing or to hear the chants of the brethren. He said nothing, however, of the longing in his breast: "The decorum of religion," Bonaventura tells us, "would not permit him to ask for it at the hand of man;" and it

is difficult to imagine that Brother Bernard, or crafty Elias, even had he asked it of them, could have charmed his ear with harp or lute. But as he lay awake one night in his weakness, suddenly his desire was granted to him. "He heard the sound of a harp, of wonderful harmony and most sweet melody." The sound went and came, as if the players were moving to and fro under the convent windows. The reader's eyes fill, and his heart melts, at the simple wonderful tale. And why should not some tender wandering angel have stooped through those soft depths of southern night and made a visionary, ineffable music under the window where lay his mortal brother? All the arguments of philosophy cannot bring any reason to the heart why it should not be so.

Francis himself, however, was very careful to ascribe no essential importance either to the miraculous power with which he was believed to be endowed, or to his perpetual and painful service of God in mortification and fasting. His Three Companions acknowledge that miracles do not make holiness, but are merely a proof of it, as has been already quoted; their leader goes a step further, and recognizes a still more important truth. A man might do all these things, he allowed, and yet be no true servant of God. "A sinner," he said, "can fast, pray, weep, mortify his flesh: this only he cannot do—be faithful to his Lord." Thus, while the country rang with his virtues and his miracles, Francis himself realized fully the superficial character of such fame. "I may yet have sons and daughters," he said, with quaint mistrust of himself when his disciples paid him homage. It was the worst possible representation of downfall and backsliding which he could make to his own heart.

CHAPTER IX.

POVERTY AND FRANCIS.

IT is somewhat difficult to understand in these days the special devotion to Poverty as Poverty, which was the first principle of life in the little convent at the Portiuncula. While we are able to realize the merit of those who bear it cheerfully, and accept it, when necessary, with patience and courage, and still more to appreciate the devotion of such as abandon everything for the service of God, it is still difficult to make out how the mere fact of voluntary destitution should be in itself a virtue.

It is difficult to understand, just as it is difficult for us to understand why the saying of twelve *Paters* should be better than the saying once of that wonderful prayer. But the age in which Francis lived was not one given to spiritual interpretations or philosophical glosses. It was literal, and took words for things. In such a mind as his own, the great end was always present—the elevation of the spirit over the flesh, of the unseen over the visible; and there can be no doubt that he was fully possessed with the importance of the lesson conveyed to a self-seeking, riotous, and violent world, by his own utter and voluntary abandonment of everything it held most dear, for Christ's sake. But even with Francis the means were in themselves precious, as

well as the end. A certain intrinsic good was to him in Poverty itself, irrespective of its object. He preferred to beg his bread, even when it was provided for him according to the letter of the evangelical commission, by the hospitality of the faithful. Always true and natural, and unexaggerated in his commands to others, he set our Lord's simple injunction, "Eat what is set before you," in the heart of his Rule, as the guide of social conduct to his brethren. But in his own heart there lingered a tender, half-fantastic preference for meaner fare. It was sweet to him to receive his morsel out of God's very hand, as it were, through the hand of charity. He liked to eat the broken bit of bread which had been given to him as simple alms, from the kindness of some stranger, rather than the food provided on the table of his host. When he was on his way to Cardinal Ugolino's great Roman Palazzo or the legate's palace in Florence or Bologna, which his friend occupied from time to time, he would stop in the narrow streets and beg some bit of commonest sordid food to carry with him as his share of the meal. He did it with a touch of the foolish-sublime of feeling—the natural weakness of humanity breaking softly through the nobility of a great purpose—such as brings a smile and a tear together to the looker-on, and endears the man to us, under the aureole of the saint. It was his weakness: his tender soul longed to go beyond the commandment, and make himself less than the least. In the ardour of love and self-abandonment he was fain to do a little more than was asked of him. Poverty was his bride. He loved her for herself. It was his pleasure to be destitute—to starve if God pleased, yet to feel the certainty that he should not starve, neither he nor his brethren, because

God cared for them. But this beautiful excess of devotion is a thing which but one individual, here and there, can feel; and Francis's life was, in its latter days, disturbed, on the one hand, by perpetual conflict with innovators, whose object was to introduce relaxations into the Rule; and, on the other, by that servile shadow of lazy beggary which is the fleshly interpretation of his divine aim. Before resuming the thread of his history, however, we will here add certain traits of his delight in poverty, and tender love of the poor, which may give the reader a fuller insight into the nature of the man.

Francis was accompanied on one of his journeys by Fra Masseo, the same simple brother of whom we have already spoken, who taught the angel visitor how to knock at the convent-door. As they journeyed—they were going to Provence, says the legend—they suddenly came upon a very clear fountain in a solitary spot, by the side of which was a great smooth stone in the form of a table. The imagination of Francis, always open to the delights of natural beauty, was struck with this bit of landscape, and, as his self-denial does not seem to have reached the point of denying himself so simple though so real a pleasure, he proposed that they should stop here and dine. They had passed not long before through a village, where they had begged needful provision from door to door. When the fragments they had thus collected were spread out upon their stone table, the heart of the wanderer overflowed with pathetic satisfaction and delight. "Our blessed father," says the chronicler, "full of joy and lightheartedness in the midst of such poverty, said, 'We are not worthy of such a treasure!'" He said the same words again and again, as seems to have been habitual to him. But Masseo, plain man

not given to any poetic sense of the loveliness around him, grew a little impatient, we may suppose, of this untimely exhilaration. "How can any one talk of a great treasure when poverty is so hard upon us?" he said. "Where are the man-servants and the maid-servants, the goblets, the cups, the precious wines, and rich food to place upon our stone table?" There is a touch almost of satire in the question. But it does not seem that Francis was discomposed by the half-sneer of his companion. "What we have is our treasure," he replied, "and this table is to me rich and precious, where nothing has been prepared by the work of man, or arranged by human skill, but everything is provided for us by the hand of God."

On another occasion, we are told that his friend the Cardinal was offended with him for bringing the broken bread, given to him as alms, to his table. Francis made an eloquent defence of the necessity which was laid upon him, as the head and example of the Order, to maintain, under all circumstances, its Rule of utter poverty, and added, in his lofty, gentle poetic fashion, a little outburst of praise over his miserable fare. "The bread given in alms is holy and blessed bread," he cried; "it is sanctified by the praise and love of the Almighty. When a brother asks alms, he begins by saying, 'Praised and blessed be the Lord our God;' then he adds, 'Give me alms, for the love of the Lord our God.' Thus, praise sanctifies the bread, and it is made blessed by the love of the Lord."

The same sentiment, curiously enlarged and deepened, as it is natural it should be when more formally expressed, forms the burden of the following address, made in some private and familiar assembly of his disciples:—"His brethren once asked him in conclave,"

Bonaventura tells us, "by what virtue we become dearest to Christ; to which he, as if opening to them the secret of his heart, replied, 'Know, my brethren, that poverty is the special way to salvation; for it is the food of humility and the root of perfection, whose roots, although hidden, are manifold. This is the treasure, of which we read in the Gospel, which was hidden in a field: to buy which a man should sell all that he hath, and, in comparison with which, all that can be given for its purchase is to be accounted as nothing. And he who would attain to this height must lay aside not only worldly prudence, but even all knowledge of letters, that thus stript of all things, he may come to see what is the power of the Lord.'"

The whole superstructure of Francis's life was built upon this theory of the absolute superiority of poverty, not only as a means but as an end; yet notwithstanding, his eye was ever alert to note any deviation from the spirit, however it might be in accordance with the letter of the Rule. For example, we are told that he reproved severely certain of the brethren who allowed themselves to grow idle, or worked lazily. "The lukewarm," he said, "and those who do not work sincerely and humbly, will be rejected by God. I desire that all my brethren should labour at useful occupations, that we may be less of a burden to the people, and also that we may be less subject to maladies of the heart and tongue, and may not be tempted to evil thoughts or evil speaking. Those who cannot work, let them learn to work. As for the profit of the work, it must not remain at the disposal of the earner, but at the will of the superior or guardian." This is an express repudiation beforehand of the reproach of idleness as addressed to the Franciscans; but already

there were, it is evident, some who had disregarded the commands of the founder. To some, too, he had to ordain moderation in their collection of alms, that they should not ask with too great persistence, and that they should hold in horror everything that was superfluous. "My brethren," he said, "ask only such things as are necessary for food and clothing. For my own part, I thank God I have never been an extorter of alms: I have always asked for less than my necessities required, that I might not defraud the other poor of their portion; and I have always regarded any other mode of asking alms as robbery."

Along with this perpetual care that his Order might be kept from all love of property or shame of indigence, and yet at the same time preserved from idleness, he had the most overflowing charity to all who were poor. The thought of his ancient extravagance, we are told, sometimes crossed his mind with a twinge of remorse, moving him to more and greater liberality towards the needy. "It is but just," he said, "that a man who hesitated at no expense, and who showed himself so eager to oblige his friends in order to obtain the glory of this world, and its fleeting favour—it is just that such a man should manifest the same liberality towards the poor, because of God, who recompenses so liberally." From this prevailing sentiment of his mind the curious little incidents in his life, of charity carried to the heroic point, result quite naturally. They are the inevitable actions of a spirit which, receiving everything direct from God's hand, feels itself by that mere fact bound to transfer those gifts to any creature of God's who has the appearance of standing in greater need than itself. Thus it is recorded that, one day returning from service, he met a poor man clad in miserable

rags, and half naked, on the way. The sight moved his generous soul to sudden compunction. "My brother," he cried, turning to his companion who followed him, "I must give up the mantle which I wear above my gown to this poor man, for it belongs to him. I had it but as a loan until I should meet some one who had more need of it than I." Probably it was winter, chilled with that Tramontana which blows so keen from the snow-clad hills; for the brother who accompanied him made a strenuous opposition to the transfer, knowing his master's need. But Francis silenced his remonstrances with the absolute voice of authority. "I should consider it a robbery," he said, "for which I should have to give account to the great Giver of all things, if I did not give what I have to one who is more poor than I." Probably it was at the sight of the same poor man, almost naked in the cold, that he cried out with tears to his companions, "This man's misery covers us with confusion; for we have chosen poverty as a great treasure, and lo! he is poorer than any one of us."

This readiness to give the very last and most needful of possessions is still more strikingly displayed in the following story, which perhaps some readers may think was carrying liberality too far. He was told one day that a poor woman, whose two sons had both joined the Order, was asking relief at the convent-gate. The brother who informed him of this appeal, added, on being questioned, that there was absolutely nothing in the house which could be given to her; but that in the church there was still remaining one single piece of property—the New Testament from which the brethren read the lessons. "Very well," said Francis, "give it to our mother, that she may sell it for her necessities; for I believe firmly that we shall be

more agreeable to God by giving this book to a poor woman than reserving it for our own reading." It must be remembered, in reading this anecdote, that the knowledge of Francis himself of the Holy Scriptures was but limited, that he believed himself to be under the immediate direction of God, without such absolute need of an intermediary revelation as we have, that probably the community did not know much Latin, and that consequently the book was not always of first importance to them. But still it was the treasure of the Church, the last necessary of Christian worship. In the same spirit he declined to allow the younger brethren to retain any portion of their worldly property—an enlargement of the Rule, which was asked of him at a time of great destitution. "God forbid," he said, "that for any man whatsoever we should thus sin against the Rule. I would rather have you strip the altar of the glorious Virgin, should necessity so require, than infringe in the slightest degree the vow of poverty and the due observance of the Gospel precept. For rather would the Blessed Virgin see her altar unadorned, and the commands of the Holy Ghost perfectly observed, than that her altar should be ornamented, and her Son's commands set at nought."

He was equally rigid as to the preliminary step which he demanded as a qualification for entrance into the Order—the giving of all things to the poor, which was of absolute necessity, and never to be dispensed with. A story is told by Bonaventura of a certain man in the March of Ancona, who, "led astray by carnal affection, left his property to his kindred, and not to the poor." When Francis heard of it, he, who was so gentle to all, rose up in virtuous severity and indignation. "Go thy way, Brother Fly," he said, "for

thou hast in no wise gone forth from thy kindred and from thy father's house. Thou hast given thy goods to thy family, and hast defrauded the poor: thou art not worthy to be a follower of holy Poverty." The "carnal man" returned to the world, after this rebuke, unable to attain to the entire abnegation asked of him. The reader dismisses him, not without a certain sympathy for his domestic affections; but the Rule was absolute, and so was the founder. "Sell all thou hast, and give to the poor." There could be no compromise with these distinct words, the first commission and warrant upon which all his work was built.

And while he was thus unbending as regarded the letter of the Rule, he was always watchful that his own conduct should give no kind of excuse to any relaxation of discipline. We have already recorded his manner of depriving himself of any enjoyment of the feasts to which he was sometimes invited. Here is another curious instance of his severity to himself. He had been invited by the Cardinal Santa Croce to visit him for some days at Rome, and had consented out of the courtesy which never abandoned him. The first night, however, which he spent under the roof of the cardinal's palace was much troubled and disturbed. "Demons," says the legend, "threw themselves with fury upon the soldier of Christ," and the morning found him utterly exhausted, "half dead" upon the unaccustomed bed. A similar painful result had once occurred at the Portiuncula—where he habitually slept on the naked floor—when a little pillow of feathers had been placed under his aching head by some kind brother—an indulgence which drove rest from him. When he raised himself from his broken dreams in his chamber at the Cardinal's palace, he called his

companion to him with the signs of the conflict in his worn countenance. "The devils have no power but that which is granted to them from on high," he said; "they have been permitted to throw themselves on me so cruelly, because my stay in this palace is a bad example to others. When my brethren, who dwell in poor houses, hear that I visit cardinals, they may suspect me of loving the things of this world, and giving up my heart to its delights." Upon which, with humble excuses to his host, he left the Cardinal suddenly, at break of day.

In all these details of his personal life, the transparent beauty and simplicity of his character shine out at every turn. When he was sick and ill, he was counselled by one of the brethren to have a fox's skin sewn inside his frock, to ease him a little with its warmth and softness. Francis was too reasonable even in his asceticism to refuse so natural a comfort; but he had another put outside, that he might not have the reputation of greater severity than he actually practised. And with all these mortifications and sufferings, it was his constant effort that there should be bright looks and cheerful tones about him. To one of his brethren, who had the habit of walking about sadly with his head drooping, he said—it is evident, with a spark of the impatience natural to his own vivacious spirit, "You may surely repent of your sins, my brother, without showing your grief so openly. Let your sorrow be between God and you: pray to Him to pardon you by His mercy, and to restore to your soul the joy of His salvation. But before me and the others be always cheerful, for it does not become a servant of God to have an air of melancholy and a face full of trouble." When some doubting soul questioned him how it was that he himself, amid so

many distractions, preserved his serenity and light-heartedness, Francis replied in the same strain. "Sometimes my sins are very bitter to me," he said, "sometimes the devil attempts to fill me with a sadness which leads to indifference and sleep; for my joy is a vexation to him, and he is jealous of the blessings I receive from God. But when I am tempted to sadness or slothfulness, I look at the cheerful air of my companion, and, seeing his spiritual joy and happiness, I shake off the temptation and the idle sorrow, and am full of joy within and gaiety without." Such was his version of what a life should be which was led in hunger, and cold, and nakedness, far from every human consolation, for the love of God.

As Francis thus hated with all the generous vehemence of his nature everything that savoured of sanctimoniousness, he was equally careful to avoid all the ostentations of spiritual delight. He thought it sacrilege to reveal any special revelation of God's love to the vulgar eye. "When a servant of God receives any Divine inspiration in prayer, he ought to say, 'This consolation, O Lord, Thou hast sent from heaven to me, a most unworthy sinner, and I commit it to Thy care, for I know I should be but a thief of Thy treasure.' And when he retires to prayer, he ought to bear himself as a little one and a sinner, as if he had received no new grace from God." He who shed so many tears in secret that his sight was well-nigh lost in consequence, refrained from all public manifestations of emotion when he prayed with the brethren, in the innate modesty of his soul. And he was courteous to his last breath, full of the tenderest consideration for all When one of the brethren had made a rough answer to a poor beggar who followed

them with his importunities, Francis was filled with a certain horror of compunction which is very characteristic of his intensely sympathetic mind. He made the uncivil brother prostrate himself at the feet of the beggar, and ask his pardon and his prayers. A similar incident is told in the *Fioretti* in respect to certain robbers who were sent away hungry from the convent-door, but whom Francis could not but recognize as brothers, not feeling himself called upon to be their judge in their moment of want.

We are tempted to insert here another little incident not exactly of the same character as those just quoted, yet bearing a certain affinity to them in the light it throws upon the wonderful simplicity of his mind. It occurred in the midst of his devotions, at the moment of all others when the glory of heaven seemed most to glow round "the seraphic Father." He had carved a little wooden vase, on some occasion when there was nothing else doing, that his hands might be occupied—some pretty bit of golden olive-wood, no doubt, which it had pleased him to shape and decorate. But while he prayed, a sudden thought of the toy came into his mind, distracting him in the midst of his devotions. Innocent distraction! tender weakness! He put his work in the fire, with an outburst of simple remorse, when the service was over. It is as if some angel had bethought himself, in the glory of God's presence, of a fretted harp-string—if harp-strings can fret in heaven.

We add a little exposition which Francis made to his favourite brother Leo, touching the perfection of human comfort and satisfaction, one day, when they walked together on their evangelical mission. Nothing can more clearly show the difference of the mediæval mind from our own, or the wonderful

absorption of this individual man in the life and conditions which he held to be most accordant with the will of God.

"Although the Brothers Minor," it was his pleasure to say, "give good example and great edification to all the world by the holiness of their life, perfect joy consists not in that. And though a Brother Minor give sight to the blind, heal the cripples, cast out devils, make the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, and, what is more, give life to the four-days dead, perfect joy is not there. And if a Brother Minor knows all tongues, all knowledge, and writings, so that he can foretell things to come, and disclose the secrets of the heart, perfect joy is not there. If a Brother Minor speak like an angel, and understand the course of the stars, the virtues of herbs, and all treasures of the earth,—should he know the nature of birds, of fishes, of animals, of men, of roots, of trees and waters, perfect joy lies not in that. But when we come to the Convent of our Lady of Angels, all drenched and frozen with cold, and oppressed with hunger; if when we knock at the gate, the porter comes in wrath to ask us, 'Who is there?' we answer him, 'We be two of thy brethren,' and he replies to us with rage, saying, 'Ye be vagabonds, who ramble the world over, and steal the poor man's alms,' then, without opening to us the gate, leaves us exposed to the snow and rain, and well-nigh famished with hunger—then if we suffer these rebuffs and injuries patiently, without complaint or murmuring, and think humbly that this porter knows us full well, and that God urges him to use such language against us, in that there is perfect peace. And if we continue to knock, and the porter comes out against us as against beggars, buffets us, and lays hard blows upon us, saying to us, 'Away with you, lazy wretches, get you to the hospital; you are fine fellows! good-bye, there is nought here for you to eat,'—if we bear these things with patience, and pardon with all our heart these injuries, in that there is perfect joy. And if in this affliction, oppressed by hunger, benumbed with cold, and the night drawing on, we knock again and pray him with cries and groans that he will open to us the gate, instead of being touched with pity, he throws himself into a great rage, and

says, 'Here be men full impudent and obstinate, I'll go and dress them soundly,' whereat he comes forth, a huge knotty stick in his hand, and seizing us by the hood, casts us on the earth in the mire, and covers us with blood from blows of his stick,—if we suffer joyfully these insults and these blows, remembering that we must bear our share in the sufferings of the blessed Jesus, write and mark carefully that this a true joy and peace."

CHAPTER X.

THE CHAPTER STOREARUM.

THE great Chapter of the new Order, which is distinguished by this title, took place in the year 1219; and it is not astonishing that so great and remarkable an assembly should have made an impression upon the popular imagination. It is the first time in which an actual numerical estimate of the strength of the Order is afforded us; and though it seems almost impossible to believe that five thousand brethren could already have collected around the founder, making allowance for all the contingencies of sickness and distance, it is equally difficult to doubt the numerous testimonies to that effect. Celano, it is true, takes no notice of the assembly at all; and the Three Companions relate its purport rather than its details; but Bonaventura is precise as to the number, more than five thousand, and is supported by the almost contemporary narrative of the *Fioretti*, which gives a most life-like picture of the scene—and by many other authorities. There had been several silent years in the life of Francis before this grand era. He had been, if not dwelling at home, still stationary in Italy, employing his time not only in personal missionary work, but in a general care of the Order, and oversight of all its many channels of

increase. He had made himself known in the immediate world which was most influential in Italy, in Rome, and Florence, and even, as we divine from scattered notices here and there, as far as Venice and Naples, preaching the peace of God, and carrying with him the laws and the magical attraction of the brotherhood which copied Christ's life on earth; and the brethren had travelled far, and preached continuously, though it seems uncertain whether they had yet penetrated beyond the Alps on any side but that of France. Perhaps some special effort had been made to collect every man who had taken the vows of the Brothers Minor to this particular assembly, which it is clear was of more importance in the history of the Order than any of the others as yet recorded. A certain need of general legislation seems to have shown itself; and besides the usual course of admonition and fatherly counsel on the part of the founder, and of reported progress and experience on the part of the brethren, the Chapter on this occasion had to act as a Parliament, to elect officers, and decide upon new measures for its own further increase and the consolidation of the advantages already gained. The brethren from a distance were no doubt anxious to have some recognized government and authority over them; they wanted guides for themselves, leaders of their missionary work, superiors to whom they could render the obedience which was one of their vows, but which, so long as the founder was absent, and had no representative, they could scarcely find any due means of fulfilling. And to Francis, also, it had no doubt become a necessity to have helpers in his office.

They came, therefore, from all sides, with serious thoughts and plans in their minds, in addition

to all those longings after home and friends, and brotherly communion, and the presence of him who was as a father to them all, which moved them on ordinary occasions. It would be hard to believe that no strivings of personal ambition or individual feeling, no suppressed jealousies or anxieties, were in the hearts of so great a multitude; but the record is silent as to everything but the fact of their assembling. They came pouring in from all quarters, without a purse or a penny to put therein among the entire crowd, the end of their journey being a little church and convent poor as themselves, where, instead of a supply of provisions enough for so great a multitude, there was not store enough of fragments laid up to sustain the founder and his little nucleus of monks beyond the single day. What were they coming to? Famine, disease, and death, any reasonable spectator would have said, watching the crowds come in across all the lengthened winding ways, and down the hill-sides, and from the sea—famine and destruction, unless, indeed, Ugolino, the great Cardinal, setting out from Florence, with his splendid retinue, his crosses and crosiers glittering in the sun, should bring with him enough to satisfy the wants of the multitude whom he had chosen to patronize. There was no lack of other glittering groups from all the castles and cities to see the wonderful sight. And the brown friars poured onward with bare feet plodding along the toilsome way, with uncovered heads under the blazing sun, or vast folds of cowl enveloping their faces, musing much, and saying little, giving their salutation, "The peace of God," to all they met. A strange scene—which the reader can scarcely contemplate without a thrill of something more than curiosity, a quickening

of interest and expectation such as only the eve of a great crisis can give.

The Portiuncula is situated on one of the lowest slopes of the Apennine hills—and below stretches the plain, blazing under the Italian sun, which was the only guest-chamber Francis could provide for his visitors. Here they erected a quantity of little tents made of straw thatch, or matting and rushes, such shelters from the sun as may still be seen about the Italian fields rudely propped up on posts, as no doubt were the huts of the brethren. From this peculiarity the Chapter derives its name, Storearum—the Assembly of the straw huts. They were arranged, we are told, in distinct lines, according to the provinces from which the brethren came. The bands were of unequal numbers—here forty, here eighty, there a hundred, say the *Fioretti*, but all so placed (*a schiera a schiera*, band by band) that their nationality might be at once identified. It must be remembered that it was at Pentecost, in the sweetest time of the year, when that Umbrian plain would be all ablaze with flowers, and the summer not yet arrived at its most fervent heat, but supportable even during the day under those cool coverts, and delicious in the sweetness of the night. The scene is set before us in the *Fioretti* with all the reality which would naturally belong to the narrative of an eye-witness. And if we can trust the anonymous chronicler, not only Cardinal Ugolino, but St. Dominic was in the assembly, watching with curious, critical, not enthusiastic eyes, how the other Order was managed, and making his comments within himself. Francis had made no provision for the crowd which surrounded him; he had dared to throw his entire brotherhood, as he threw himself, upon the bounty of

Providence, and met them cheerfully, without a crust to give them, with a faith which, even to his fellow-saint, seems to have, for the moment, appeared more rash than sublime. With all these illustrious visitors looking on, Francis, probably from one of the little turfy hillocks of the slope, addressed his brethren all camped around him, swarming among the narrow passages that divided those coverts of straw. He preached to them briefly, not caring, says the author of the *Fioretti*, to make a sermon. "My children," he said, "we have promised great things to God, and greater things still have we promised to ourselves from God; let us observe those which we have promised to Him, and certainly expect those which are promised to us." At the end of this address he exhorted them to give no thought what they were to eat or drink, but only to praise God—upon which, continues the *Fioretti*,

"St. Domenico, who was present at this Chapter, was much amazed by the command of St. Francesco, and considered it indiscreet, not being able to imagine how so great a multitude could be provided for without having any care or solicitude for the things necessary for the body; but the Chief Shepherd, the blessed Christ, wishing to show how He cared for His sheep, and His singular love for His poor, immediately inspired the people of Perugia, Spoleto, Foligno, Assisi, and the surrounding country, who brought supplies of provisions to the holy congregation; and behold there suddenly appeared from the beforesaid towns, men with asses, horses, carts, laden with bread, wine, beans, and game, and other good things according as the poor of Christ had need. And along with this they brought table-cloths, glasses, everything that was necessary for the table; and he was considered happy who could carry most things, and could serve most humbly; and even the knights and barons, and other noblemen who had come to look on, with great humility began to serve also. St. Domenico seeing all this, and recognizing truly that the Divine Providence was to be

seen in it, humbly acknowledged that he had falsely judged St. Francesco, and going to him on his knees, humbly confessed his sin, and added, 'Truly God has a special care of this poor family, and I knew it not.'"

It would be difficult to imagine a scene more strikingly picturesque and impressive—the mass of brown-robed brethren among their little huts, the gay cavalcades from the surrounding country, the scarlet Cardinal with his many-coloured attendants, the devout margin of wondering *contadini* and *cittadini*, peasants and townsfolk, in their brilliant mediæval dresses; and over all the slopes, down from the hills, winding along the roads that covered the plain, the laden asses, the rude carts of the villagers, the homely primitive abundance, bread and wine, lentils and those beans, *fève*, which still form so large a portion of the sustenance of the poorest classes in Italy—with perhaps now and then a basket of small birds. He was a happy man who brought the most to this strange open-air feast, which, let us hope, was not eaten till after the rigour of the blazing sunshine was over, when the skies began to grow soft with the haze of evening. Many a Franciscan brother of the present day, and many an abstemious Italian bound by no vow, finds one huge meal a day sufficient for all his requirements. And thus the great Chapter was no doubt supplied.

Among the crowd of his followers thus assembled, Francis made his way, not with the state that belonged to the general of an Order, but with all the homely grace and cordial kindness which were natural to him. He went from band to band, giving them his simple admonitions, as had been his wont at the less solemn assemblies which had gathered round him on previous Pentecosts. How they should hear mass devoutly,

venerate priests, love the poor, were the precepts he gave them. And though they had more important business to settle, it is evident that to the spectators the aspect of the assembly was, above all, devotional. "They were so occupied in talking of God, in prayers and tears and exercises of charity, and all with so much gravity and modesty, that no noise was heard, and no one was disturbed," says the chronicle already quoted. And Cardinal Ugolino, marvelling to see such a multitude so well ordered, with tears and great devotion cried, "Truly this is the camp and army of the knights of God."

The specific business of the assembly, however, was not exclusively devotional. There was no discussion of secular affairs among them, we are told; but this epithet must, we suppose, be applied to questions of money or lands, or pecuniary matters generally, which, as the community possessed no money, could not have occupied it much. But the real organization of the Order was here, it is evident, not only discussed, but, for the first time, formally established. "Ministers were elected," say the Three Companions, "and sent out with the brethren into all the provinces of the world in which the Catholic faith is observed." Francis had theoretically established this office of Minister when he framed his Rule, and chosen the title in accordance with the humility which it was his desire should always guide his followers. He would not permit to them the title of Abbot, or Prior, or Provincial General, as savouring too much of worldly rank, but desired that the superior of each community should be called simply the Guardian (Padre Guardiano) and the Provincial, the Minister or servant of all. But though these offices had been theoretically established, this is the first formal mention of any

election; and the event marks the progress which had been made. The community had grown too extensive to be kept under one single head, like a primitive clan. It had outgrown its little solitary houses and simple guardians. The province which could send, not a little domestic party, but the distinct *schiera* which encamped under the shadow of the Portiuncula—a battalion of as many as eighty or a hundred monks—had need of some authority above that of the convent superior, and yet nearer to it than the founder himself, the corporate head of all. And when this step was taken as regarded the provinces which had already embraced the Rule, it naturally led to the further appointment of Ministers to lead and guide the missionary bands, who were now, it would seem for the first time, sent into the more distant countries of the Continent. Another point had been reached in the development of the Order. It had become a recognized corporation and power, and its organization was now complete.

This great Chapter was thus remarkable in more ways than one. It consisted of an unparalleled number of brethren, and it took an important step in the organization of the community; the one fact being a natural result of the other. The monkish critics, so many of whom have considered and reconsidered every detail of the simple history, shake their heads and puzzle their faculties over the calculation how enough brethren could have been left behind in their respective convents to perform the ordinary devotional and domestic duties, while yet so large a number as five thousand gathered around the mother-house. This difficulty, it seems to us, is got over by the supposition that an assembly so important was in reality a full Chapter, attended by every brother not

detained by bodily infirmities, according to the first provisions of the Rule. The internal organization was still, it is evident, very incomplete, and the convents were scarcely old enough or stately enough to demand the perpetual presence of a body of monks, when more important affairs drew them another way. When Francis himself went to Rome to propound his Rule first to the Pope, he left no domestic nucleus behind, but went with the whole body of his disciples —all his following. And it requires no great effort of imagination to realize that, for an assembly which concerned them so deeply, the entire mass of the brethren might follow his example. They had done so while yet the Order was small enough to be counted by individuals, coming back from long journeys, crossing sea and land, as Francis himself did, rather than miss the yearly meeting; and what more likely than that this had been done now, when the occasion was so great as to warrant a great effort? The humblest brother of the community had a personal interest in the choice of the Minister who was to be his absolute ruler, and in whose hands he was commanded to be as a dead body, moved at his will, and resisting nothing he might choose to do or to ordain. And the new convents, which were too poor to tempt any robber, might well be left vacant, or in the charge of any infirm brother whose strength was unequal to the journey; while every man able to bear its fatigues came to assist in the first great election, and to aid with whatever insight or wisdom might be in him, the Founder in his responsibility. For nothing less than its unusual character could have so impressed this assembly on the imagination of the age. If the scene had been a usual one; if the townsfolk had come often with their laden carts and liberal charities;

if the rushy huts and travel-worn strangers covering all the great plain; and the vast meal out-of-doors, so solemnly accidental, so full of grateful surprise and anxious cordiality,—the wealthy citizens spreading their best fare on the turf, the great nobles leaping from their horses to lend an awkward, unaccustomed hand and serve the poor brethren with the bread which was thus sent to them like manna out of heaven,—if all this had been a matter of yearly occurrence at the Portiuncula, repeated over and over, to the same extent and with the same solemnity, as Pentecost came round, it must have lost much of its impressive character. The people of Assisi and the neighbourhood must, in such a case, have come to regard the multitude as a natural sign of Pentecost, as eggs are of Easter—an event requiring no such record as that given to the Chapter Storearum, the great assembly of the rushy huts, the meeting of the five thousand. Only the fact that it stood alone in its magnitude, and was not simply one of many, could account for the place it holds in the picturesque and oft-repeated tale.

And as the meeting was solemn, so also was the parting. The new Ministers, whom we may suppose were chosen among the elder disciples, and specially approved by Francis, were going forth into new regions with all the chances before them of good and evil fortune. Many of them had a sufficiently painful experience to go through ere they should see that haven of quietness at the Portiuncula again. Some of them—if we may believe the vague report that some went as far as Greece, and there lost their lives, and that some carried out the project of Francis in respect to the Moors, and found martyrdom among them—were never to return again. And Francis

himself had bent all his powers to the carrying out finally of his long-projected journey to Syria. There was no prophet to tell what dark and terrible things might happen before the brightening of another summer brought back the holy time of Pentecost and the succeeding Chapter; and many a contingency was in the mind of the eager missionaries as they bade each other farewell. Their hope might be to come back and see the same kind faces, the same peaceful home again; but their desire and longing was for the sudden sword or stake which should carry them in the chariots of Israel, violently and triumphantly, to stand before the throne of God. It was the only ambition which remained in their souls. Francis himself made no secret of his desire, nor thought it wrong; and he could not chide his followers for seeking the same way of escape out of all the hardships and toils of this life to their glorious home in another world. Thus they took their farewell solemnly, wending their way in all directions, back to the new centres they had formed—out to the wide and dark world in which they had to begin over again the work of conversion. Francis himself went once more to Ancona to take ship for the East; and the others departed over the Alpine heights, and across the Adriatic, and through the sunny ways of Italy; leaving the Portiuncula, with its scanty band of monks, as silent and lonely as any little home could be, left standing, after all the life and movement had ebbed out of it, on the margin of the hills.

We may here follow the story of one party of these outgoing Ministers, which our Bollandist culls for us out of various records, not without a certain grim smile at the simplicity of the brethren. "They" (the Ministers) "were received in certain provinces, but not

permitted to build dwellings, and from some were expelled as supposed heretics," say the Three Companions. This, says the critic, was partly caused in Germany and Hungary—where alone such misfortunes seem to have happened—by their ignorance of the language. Whether they expected to be miraculously prepared for their work, when they should reach the scene of it, we cannot tell; but anyhow they ventured bravely upon Teutonic soil, without any means of communication with the people. This gives us a certain clue to the limitations of their previous journeys. Some of them could no doubt speak, like Francis, the tongue of France, and the similarity of the two languages would make it possible for them to make their way in Spain; but the Teutonic language and ways were unknown to them, and no compromise could be made between that unaccommodating tongue and the soft Italian. We are told that when these simple brethren had made the discovery that to say *Ja* when hospitality was offered them procured them kindness and lodging, it occurred to their straightforward minds that *Ja* was the thing to be said under all circumstances; and accordingly when they were asked if they were heretics, and if the object of their mission was to cut off Germany from the Church, they unhesitatingly repeated the monosyllable which they had already agreed among themselves to use always, with smiles of honest confidence, feeling it a stronghold to them. The result was, that the alarmed missionaries, with the smile still on their lips, were driven out of the country, pursued with reproaches and insults, and in many cases thrown into prison and overwhelmed with punishments. What they had done with the innocent affirmative, which it was so easy to utter, they had no

store of other words to undo. And the Teutons were too orthodox to trifle with heresy. It may be imagined what were the feelings of devout Catholics so faithful to the Holy See and to everything that was most orthodox in the faith, when they found themselves thus stigmatized. They returned "with bitterness," says the chronicle. But it was not till the return of Francis from the East that the plaints of his indignant disciples reached him. In the meantime, he himself had an enterprise still more dangerous in hand.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EXPEDITION TO SYRIA.

As soon as the Chapter was over, Francis set out on his long-cherished mission, no doubt much comforted by the elections he had just accomplished, and the weight he had thus transferred from his own burdened shoulders. He went—as he had planned to go among the Moors—with the intention and hope of converting the Soldan, and thus accomplishing a more effectual crusade than any that could be undertaken by the arms of the Western powers. It seems to have been his peculiar conception of missionary work. There were plenty of so-called Christians in the East whom his preaching might have moved to greater zeal and purity; yet it does not seem that such an idea ever crossed his mind. For there was in that country a heathen prince, very strong and powerful, who had the Holy Places in his hands, and whom it was infinitely difficult, notwithstanding the superiority of European arms and Christian knights, to subdue. Thousands had shed their blood in the enterprise, and yet Jerusalem was more securely in the possession of the heathen than ever. Was it wonderful that Francis should think how much better a plan it would be to convert that Soldan, and transfer into his Mahometan bosom all a Christian's reverence for the holy Sepulchre? It is easy to trace in this repeated project an inspiration

most congenial and natural to his character. After all, it was such a little matter which made all those Crusades necessary, and cost so great an expenditure of Christian lives—only to convert a man, a race, to the true faith—a thing which it was, in the first place, the duty of everybody, and especially of himself, Francis, to attempt, and which would be attended by so many and unspeakable blessings. Jerusalem was much, with all its Holy Places; and there is no appearance that Francis was before his age, or disapproved in any way of the Crusades; but his simple mind and tender heart went beyond all such artificial means of victory. Jerusalem was much—but to win a race to the Saviour was more. Christian blood had been shed in floods without accomplishing the one; but what if the martyrdom of one poor preacher might secure the other? And who so joyfully ready to offer himself to purchase his Arab brother by the shedding of his own generous blood as Francis, whose last and greatest desire it was to die, like his Master, for the salvation of men? It is the exact repetition of the argument which he must have made with himself in respect to the Moor. And it is in reality the only argument which goes to the root of the subject. What strange difference might there have been in modern history had all his Order been seized by the same thought, and had the Christian world in general, instead of pursuing with the sword, bethought itself of converting the Saracen! The simplicity of the notion is so great that it moves the reader to a smile; and yet why not Saladin as well as Clovis? why not the Soldan as well as Constantine?

The prophet of Assisi saw no difference. The Soldan was his brother; it was his duty to bring him to God; and thus he marched his barefooted

downright way, through all sophistries and conventionalities, straight to the root of the matter. It was right that the Sepulchre of our Lord should be in Christian hands; but then it was also the highest right, the one certain duty of man, to make the heathen holder of that sepulchre a Christian, to make all heathens Christians, and all wicked men just, and all the world a garden of the Lord. It was the easiest, briefest, most certain mode of mending all miseries. Were it a robber among the woods of Apennine, or a Pagan leader, or any other enemy of any Christian state, the formula of Francis was sublime in its simplicity—not hang him, fight against him, subdue him, as said the other common-place, superficial people, but—convert him. Instead of punishment or pain for his body, unbounded blessings for his soul. Only make him a Christian; this was his panacea for all evil. Instead of sacrificing whole masses of men-at-arms, great, gleaming, armour-clad knights, and bowmen and spearmen, whose children looked out for them wistfully across all the Western seas, Francis would have sacrificed, had he got his will, a few generations of solitary monks, himself the first—and all these foreign Eastern alien races would have become our brothers in the faith! He saw it all clear and simple as daylight, with visionary eyes which grew radiant at the prospect. And he was mad to dream of anything so wild, we say, with our old nineteenth-century experience. "A mild, sincere enthusiast, not quite sane," says the philosophical historian of the Middle Ages; yet it would be hard to find a more grand conception of the way of reforming a world, and setting its wrongs right. Nor was it altogether the delusion of an inexperienced visionary. Francis had set wrong right in this same ineffable,

simple way before now. He had tamed down a rough mediæval soldier into a humble, obedient monk. He had made the tyrant gentle and the wicked pure. It was the Master's way, whom he followed. And, in the confidence of his simplicity, he set out to make this wonderful experiment, no ways objecting, rather desiring, that the seed he sowed should be first watered by his blood.

He is said, by some of the later historians, to have been accompanied by twelve disciples in the expedition; but it is necessary to warn the reader that, in times long after that of Francis, his Order took into their minds the idea of shaping every detail of his life so as to place it in exact correspondence with that of our Lord; and it is quite possible that this number, neither less nor more, of companions is one of the after-growths of this superstition. It is, however, very probable that he took a party with him, whatever their number might be; for there are indications that he left some representatives behind when he himself withdrew from Egypt. But it is only certain that he was accompanied by Illuminato of Rieti, a man whose name seems in some degree to have indicated his qualities, and from whom, on more than one occasion, he is known to have asked advice and guidance. The two brethren, according to the legend —which we quote simply as legend, without assigning to it any authority—were followed to the ship by a crowd of disciples too great to be taken upon such a long and perilous journey. Francis, like Sir Launcelot, was incapable of discourtesy. He could not repulse arbitrarily even those whose indiscreet devotion troubled him most. In this dilemma, he turned to a poor boy who stood by, staring at the strange Frati in their brown gowns, and referred the matter to his

utter ignorance and simplicity. The lad, inspired, say the chroniclers, by the Spirit, unhesitatingly indicated who should go, and who should remain. And the brethren, receiving it as they would have received the decision of Providence by drawing of lots or any other established method of divination, rendered instant and unhesitating obedience. The reader will suspect that the kind eyes of Francis, not without a certain gleam of humour in them, must have made some communication on the subject to the keen intelligence of the sharp-witted Italian boy, used, as his nation still is, to all manner of telegraphic signs; but we have no warrant for making such a supposition in the face of his many solemn and simple references by means of the Bible and other *sortes* to the direct decision of God.

The crusading army was in Egypt, occupied at the time in the siege of Damietta; and thither Francis and his companions went. He is described to us by the Bishop of Ptolemais, Jacobus de Vitriaco, who was there present, "as an ignorant and simple man, beloved of God and men." There is no record that he attempted any missionary work among the soldiers of the Crusade. His object was entirely different; and it may well have been that he left this charge to his companions. The Sultan, Malek-al-Kamed, was encamped upon the other bank of the Nile. Whether it was simply one of the practices of the semi-barbarous warfare, or whether the incursions of small parties of Christians may have specially troubled the country and invited such reprisals, we are not informed; but the Sultan, we are told, had offered a reward of a gold bezant to whosoever should bring him the head of one of the invaders. It was thus at peril of his life that Francis took even the first step in his

mission. "He undertook the adventure," says Bonaventura, "not terrified by the fear, but rather excited by the desire of death." He set out with Brother Illuminato, after prayer to God, singing that tenderest of all consolatory psalms which recalls the green pastures and still waters, rather than any deadly presence of peril. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil," they sang, as they set out to cross the dangerous passage; their hearts inspired—"drunken," as says the history—with the Spirit of God and the hope of martyrdom. As they went along in this exaltation of enthusiasm and excitement, they saw two sheep getting their scanty food from the accidental tufts of herbage along the sandy way. "My brother, trust in the Lord," cried Francis, moved—as men in such circumstances often are, by some familiar, homely sight, which strikes a strange reminiscence of the ordinary and common-place into the midst of the terrible—more than if he had seen a prodigy—"my brother, trust in the Lord, for in us is fulfilled those words of the Gospel, 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.'"

This perpetual recurrence to our Lord's first charge to His disciples, which was the special commission of Francis, and had decided his life, is infinitely touching. The most literal of documents, with actual signature and seal, could not have been more real to him. Thus fulfilling the absolute letter of their instructions, the soldiers of God entered the enemy's country. They had not gone many steps further, when the fate they expected suddenly overtook them. A party of Arabs, wild and fierce figures, inspired at once by national hatred and the love of gain, yet evidently unable to shut their eyes to the fact that these strangers were

not like the other Franks, who kept them in perpetual occupation, suddenly surrounded the wayfarers. Why they were not made an end of on the spot, for the sake of the two gold bezants, it is difficult to tell. Vitriaco, who was in the camp of the Crusaders, and in all likelihood heard the story from Francis himself or his companion, gives us a brief account of the colloquy. "I am a Christian: take me to your lord," the apostle said, with something of homely dignity about him which must have impressed even those sons of the desert. "They cruelly seized and bound the servants of God," says Bonaventura, "dealing fiercely and contemptuously with them, and with many vile words and hard blows carried them along in cruel bonds;" yet still they did not sacrifice them on the spot, but conveyed them to the presence of the Sultan.

They would seem to have been led into the Court, such as it was—the head-quarters of the Prince; for the presence of certain Mahommedan priests is quaintly indicated, besides the ordinary retinue that might be supposed to attend a military chief. "Who are you, and whence do you come?" asked the Sultan, wondering no doubt at the unarmed and poorly clad prisoners. Francis answered boldly that they had been sent, not by man, but by God, to show to him and his people the way of salvation. Something of the mantle of Saladin must have fallen upon his successor. He listened without impatience to the explanation: perhaps the sincerity of the apostle impressed itself at once upon his keen Eastern faculties, or perhaps, for the first moment, the rash missionary was regarded with that reverence which in all Eastern countries is a shield to the insane. In any case, the Sultan listened with curious Oriental gravity

and politeness. We are not informed whether, as seems possible, Francis had sufficient possession of the *lingua franca* to make himself understood in his own person, or whether he had to employ an interpreter. But, however that might be, the Sultan seems to have been impressed, as Pope Innocent had been, with the character of the man who addressed him—his wonderful courage, honesty, and fervour, and the manner in which his mission had taken hold of him. The very innermost secret of power, with all absolute rulers, is this faculty for discerning the higher qualities of those whom their position brings before them; and such utter forgetfulness of self, and intense belief in the Unseen, must have made a double impression upon the Mahommedan, whose faith was not without similar examples of self-devotion. "Admiring the courage and fervour of spirit which he saw in the man of God," he gazed and listened, and at length, we are told, invited the missionary to remain with him. Then came the grand climax of Francis's eloquence. "If you and your people will be converted to Christ," cried the evangelist, "for His love I will willingly remain with you; and if you are doubtful whether or not to forswear the law of Mahommed for the faith of Christ, command a great fire to be lighted, and I will enter into it with your priests, that it may be known which faith should be held the most certain and most holy." While the stranger was thus speaking, with fire on his lips and in his heart a certain high priest, who was in the retinue of the Sultan, "one of the most aged among them, and of the greatest credit and authority," no doubt perceiving, as well as his sovereign, the strange reality that was in the man, and the deadly sincerity of his proposal, suddenly and silently withdrew out of harm's way,

not caring evidently to run the risk of such an encounter, and feeling it likely that the earnestness of the madman might actually lead to a trial of the experiment. The Sultan, who saw this significant withdrawal, answered the missionary mildly, though with, it can scarcely be doubted, a certain cynical sense of the humour of the situation. "I do not believe," he said, "that any of my priests would expose himself to the fire in defence of his faith." But Francis was not to be balked of this grand opportunity, for which he had planned and waited so long, of proving the truth of his religion, or winning for himself the palm of martyrdom. "If you will promise me for yourself and your people," he cried, "that you will embrace the worship of Christ, if I come forth unharmed, I am ready to enter the fire alone for your conversion. If I shall be burnt, let it be imputed to my sins; but if the Divine power protect me, then let all of you acknowledge Christ to be the wisdom and power of God—the true God and the Lord and Saviour of all men!"

No argument could have told so strongly upon the glowing primitive imagination of the time; but there is something even more than a fugitive impression in the effect which this sublime unreason seems to have had on the Sultan. It is evident that it went to his heart with the overwhelming effect which utter self-devotion always produces upon a high-toned and generous nature. It did not convince, but it took him by storm. He bade the poor preacher approach, and offered him gifts, if not for himself, at least for the poor, or for the erection of churches. No doubt the royal Eastern was sufficiently skilled in men to know that, though few were capable of sacrificing their own

lives for that of their fellow-creatures, it was a still smaller number who were able to refuse that silver and gold which can be put to so many generous uses. His surprises, however, were not yet over. Francis declined, with gentle obduracy, all his gifts ; not even under the guise of charity would he receive so much as the gold bezant which was the price of his head, from the Prince for whose redemption he would so gladly have given his own life. The growing wonder of the Saracen, all unused to this fashion of man, may be imagined. After such an interview, it is clear that every dream of martyrdom must have been driven from the mind of Francis. He had failed, and he had succeeded, in a way which must have wrung his heart, had he been sufficiently self-conscious to perceive it. He had recommended himself to the wonder and admiration of another mind fully able to appreciate him ; but he had not gained the object of his mission, which was, least of all things, to recommend himself.

Whether all this, which is succinctly recorded in the straightforward narrative, took place at one or at several interviews, we are unable to tell ; but it is apparent that the stay of Francis in the army of the Sultan was a short one. He is supposed to have been less than a month absent from the camp of the Crusaders, and there are various different accounts given of the circumstances which caused his return. According to some, the Sultan himself became alarmed lest the preacher, who had moved his own mind to so much personal sympathy, should produce a more practical effect upon his army, and by spreading Christianity among them, induce them to desert to the ranks of the invaders. On the other hand, we are informed that Francis himself, finding his preaching ineffectual, voluntarily withdrew

from among the unbelievers, who did him all honour, but courteously refused to accept his testimony respecting the one matter which was vital to him—a state of affairs which must have been more painful than any amount of persecution. Vitriaco informs us that the Sultan took leave of the missionary with affecting friendliness. "Pray for me," he said, "that God may reveal to me that law and faith which are according to His own heart." Probably this was in answer to some last appeal, and it might have meant more than courtesy; for, whatever may have been the impression made upon the reason of the Eastern Prince by this strange visit, it is difficult to believe that the image of Christ's devoted servant can have passed from him without more or less influencing his heart. The summons was ineffectual, but not so the living epistle visible to all.

Thus far the authentic history: the story is given by Celano and Bonaventura in full detail; but when this has been done—and a more remarkable encounter has seldom been told in history—the legend comes in, and adds a still more marvellous narrative. This latter part depends entirely upon tradition, and has no more authority than a hundred other legendary incidents, which are full in some cases of beautiful natural meaning, and in others throw a quaint and striking light upon the peculiarities of the time. Its chief recommendation—a recommendation which is very far from being a guarantee of its truthfulness—is, that it furnishes that dramatic termination to the tale which primitive humanity craves. For it is hard to be content with those fragmentary episodes, which are so like ordinary life, and so unlike the dramatic completeness of song and story. We all know well enough how often a great crisis comes

about in our own existence with solemn preparation, and a providential arrangement of circumstances, and every symptom that something grand and conclusive must come of it. When the preliminaries are all thus settled, and our hearts are at the highest throb of expectation, holding the balance between rapture and misery—lo ! the event arrives, the moment passes, and nothing at all comes of it—except, perhaps, a recollection, an impression, a disappointment—perhaps nothing but the strangest sudden relapse into the gloom of ordinary days. This is how it happens in life—and this, it would seem, is all that came of the missionary preparations of Francis. But such a breakdown is not permissible in legend. And accordingly our humble chronicler of the *Fioretti* gives the conclusion which the popular mind in all ages, and which all of us in our secret hearts, demand to complete the tale. According to this additional chapter, the Sultan not only dismissed Francis in peace, with wonder and admiration of the man's unusual qualities, but received him fully into his favour, gave him a safe-conduct by which he might go and come, with full permission to preach to his subjects, and an entreaty that he would frequently return to visit him. We are not told how long was the stay made after this by the wandering apostle and his disciples among the Saracens, but "at length," says the record, "Francis saw that he could not gain much fruit in these parts, and resolved to return home." He had in the meantime really put to the test his suggestion about the fire, having thrown himself into one by way of converting a woman who had endeavoured to tempt him. When he returned to take his leave of the friendly Prince, the following conversation occurred between them :—

"At length, St. Francis, seeing that he was able to gather no further fruit in those parts, determined by a revelation from God to return with all his companions amid the believers; and all being collected together, he returned to the Soldan, and took leave of him. And then the Soldan said to him: 'Brother Francis, willingly would I be converted to the faith of Christ, but I fear to do so now; for should they be ware of it, they would slay thee and me, with all thy companions; and since thou art yet able to do much good, and I have to finish certain very weighty matters, I would not now hasten my death or thine. But teach me how I may be saved: what thou layest upon me I am prepared to do.' Then said St. Francis, 'My lord, I now go from thee; but when I shall have returned into mine own country, and by God's grace have gone to heaven, after my death, according to God's pleasure, I will send to thee two of my brethren from whom thou shalt receive the holy baptism of Christ, and shall be saved, as my Lord Jesus Christ hath revealed to me. And do thou meanwhile free thyself from every burden, that when the peace of God shall come to thee it may find thee prepared for faith and devotion;' and thus he promised to do, and did it. But when this was done, St. Francis departed with that venerable band of holy companions; and after some years St. Francis, by the death of his body, gave up his soul to God. And the Soldan, falling into sickness, looked for the promise of St. Francis, and caused guards to stand at certain passes, and bade that if two brethren should appear in the habit of St. Francis they should at once be led to him. At that time St. Francis appeared to two brethren, and bade them that, with no delay, they should go to the Soldan, and gain his salvation, as he had promised; and the brethren at once bestirred themselves, and crossing the sea, by the said guards were led to the Soldan, and the Soldan seeing them, had passing great joy, and said, 'Now know I truly that God hath sent to me His servants for my salvation, according to the promise which St. Francis made me by revelation from God.' Receiving then instruction in the faith of Christ and holy baptism from the said brethren, being thus regenerate in Christ, he died in that sickness, and his soul was saved through the merits and through the prayers of St. Francis."

We do not ask the reader to receive this story, any

more than we ask him to believe various other particulars of the legendary life of Francis. But it completes, as the imagination requires, the strange romance of missionary zeal and endeavour which, in its first part, is as true as it is strange, and out of all ordinary rule.

After this wonderful incident, Francis returned to the camp of the Crusaders. He had seen the force and discipline of the enemy, and probably in that fighting age, even the prayerful Frate knew enough of warfare to see what issue might be expected from any encounter of arms. It is not on this reasonable ground, however, that he is supposed to have acted. The story is, that it was shown to him in a vision, that the arms of the Christians would be unsuccessful if they went to battle. After this revelation, he was in great trouble of mind, fearing that so humble a man as himself would obtain no hearing from the leaders of the army—a strange humility, considering the success which his eloquence and personal qualities had just gained. In this strait he asked the advice of Fra Illuminato, who persuaded him that he had no right to be silent, but was bound to communicate to the army what God had shown him. Emboldened by this advice, Francis made known his vision, and earnestly prayed the Christian leaders to withdraw from the decisive battle. His warning was received with contempt, as he had foreseen ; but in the month of November following was fully verified when the Crusaders were driven back with great loss from the walls of Damietta. The sympathies of Francis under such circumstances must have been divided, for it is impossible that he could have been without some personal feeling towards the tolerant and friendly prince who had received him with so much kindness.

The letters of Vitriaco, genuine and trustworthy contemporary documents, show the impression which his appearance must have made upon the more religious portion of the Crusading army. These letters are addressed to friends of the bishop in Lorraine and Brabant, whom he evidently supposed to be ignorant of the Order of the Brothers Minor, or, at least, to have had less perfect knowledge of them than his own. He describes once more their manner of life—without purse, or shoes, or staff, with their one sole woollen garment, and their absolute renunciation of everything in the shape of property, personal or corporate; and gives a striking account of the number of converts made by the sight and preaching of Francis, "simple and unlearned," such as he had seen him. Among these are not only secular men, such as he won everywhere to the new life, but priests of rank and position,—"Dom Reinerius, the prior of St. Michael's, our priest, Colinus Anglicus, with two of his brethren, to wit, Michael and Dom Matthew, to whom I committed the care of my (episcopal) church," and many others. And he describes, with much appearance of truth, the effect of the mission upon the Saracens, who received the preachers with goodwill, and listened to them cheerfully until they began to say something against the laws and faith of Mahommed, when they drove them out of their villages. Vitriaco's idea was that this new Order had been originated to form the fourth corner of the square of the Church's defenders along with the "hermits, monks, and canons" already existing, and to prepare her for her final struggle with Antichrist and the troubles of the last days.

The cause of Francis's return is also a matter about which there is some doubt; most probably it was the

simple necessity of being present at the next Chapter. But there is an account which tells us that he was pursued by letters from the brethren, warning him of the innovations introduced by Fra Elias, whom he had left behind as his vicar. He returned, it would appear, by Venice, where he also preached, and where some supernatural instances of his favour with God were apparent to the multitude. He came back, disappointed probably, giving up all thoughts of martyrdom—for this was his last expedition beyond seas—and perhaps upbraiding the weakness of his own sympathetic soul, which made him the friend of every man whom he met, and blunted all sorts of weapons that could be aimed at him. Nothing is more likely than that this popularity, from which he could not escape, was a grief and thorn in the flesh to the wandering missionary. He had no desire to be popular; but he could not put away from him the loving-kindness in his eyes, his tenderness for all God's creatures, the involuntary spring of sympathy within him, and conviction that every man he encountered was his brother. And men, sinful and obdurate, and children of wrath as they are, do somehow find out a heart that feels for them, as the birds and the bees and the wild creatures do in the unsophisticated woods. No doubt it was a trouble to Francis. He had tried his best, and all he had made by it was that incomprehensible human approbation of himself, not reception of his message. The failure must have wounded him, flattering as it was—and perhaps all the more that it was a flattering failure. Had it been accompanied by danger or distress, it might have been less heavy to bear.

He would seem to have been met at Venice (if it was there he landed) by some of the brethren, who conducted him home. Among them, we are told, was

a certain Leonard, a man of noble family of Assisi. One day, as they took their journey homeward, Francis, worn out with his fatigues, mounted an ass to relieve the tedium of the way, and Fra Leonardo walked behind him in silence, with many a thought in his mind. He too was weary, and would fain have had some aid on the way. He mused to himself with momentary sullenness as he walked by the side of the humble steed, thinking what a difference there had been between himself, a gentleman of coat-armour, and the son of Pietro Bernardone, the shopkeeper. "Yet he rides, and I lead his ass," said sulky Leonard to himself. "It is true," said Francis, suddenly getting down in the silence which no voice had broken; "that I should ride, and you walk, is against all congruity, my brother." He had read his thoughts, says the story; and no doubt he had read them, with his marvellous insight, in the cloudy brow and eye that shunned his kind glance. But Fra Leonardo, struck with this miraculous cognizance of his thoughts, fell at his master's feet and asked pardon for his wickedness. It was thus that the wandering apostle returned to his home.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRST INNOVATIONS.

THE first certain reappearance of Francis in the Italian world after his expedition into the East was of a very striking and picturesque kind. He was on his way home from Venice, travelling as we have already seen him, sometimes on foot, sometimes on the ass which Brother Leonard led. There was no special haste, for the extraordinary Chapter of the Order, to which he was returning, did not take place until the feast of St. Michael; and it was but the 15th of August when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, as it would appear, he made his appearance in the streets of Bologna. His friend, Cardinal Ugolino, was there, in the discharge of another mission as legate to Lombardy; and there, too, was at least one community of Brothers Minor, for which, since Francis had last been there, a new house had been built. The community had been established nine years before, by Brother Bernard, in the early days of the Order; and the story of its beginning is so graphic, that we pause to set it before the reader.

"Brother Bernard, making over himself the sign of the most holy cross, in his holy obedience departed and came to Bologna. And the children, seeing him in a garment of strange form and common sort, did him many insults, as they would have done to a fool; and Brother Bernard patiently

and cheerfully bore all things for the love of Christ; nay, that he might be the better tormented, he with set purpose placed himself in the market-place of the city, and sitting there, there gathered round about him many children and men; and some plucked his hood from behind, some in front, some cast dust at him, some stones, some pushed him this way, some that; and Brother Bernard, ever in the same patient sort, with cheerful countenance, complained not, nor moved, and for many days returned to that self-same spot only to bear the like.

"And because patience is the work of perfectness and proof of virtue, a learned doctor of the law, seeing and considering that the great constancy and virtue of Brother Bernard was not disturbed in so many days by any annoyance or injury, said within himself, 'It is impossible that this should not be a holy man;' and drawing near to him, he asked, 'Who art thou, and wherefore art thou come hither?" And Brother Bernard, for all reply, thrust his hand into his bosom and drew forth the Rule of St. Francis, and gave it to him to read; and the judge considering his most lofty state of perfection, with exceeding wonder and amazement turned to his companions and said, 'Truly this is the most lofty state of religion that I have ever heard of, and therefore this man, with his companions, are the most holy men in the world, and he does a most grievous wrong who does them injury, who should pay them all honour if he would be a true friend of God.' And he said to Brother Bernard, 'If ye will choose a spot in which ye may fittingly serve God, I, for the salvation of my soul, will willingly give it thee.' Brother Bernard answered, 'Sir, I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ hath inspired thee with this, and therefore willingly do I accept thy offer to the honour of Christ.' Then the said judge, with great joy and loving-kindness, led Brother Bernard to his house, and there he gave him the promised spot, and at his own expense he fitted and prepared it all; and thenceforward he became father and special defender of Brother Bernard and his companions."

From this beginning of cheerful humility and charity a prosperous community had grown; the little house had become too small for them; and one of the objects of Francis no doubt, in his present visit

was to see the new house which had been built for them by the liberality of the same generous benefactor. His arrival on that August day, in 1220, has a certain excitement in it, as of a man newly returned from the toils and perils of a long journey, finding a novelty in every familiar feature of the landscape, and with a glow of satisfaction in his home-coming, and thankful yet anxious eagerness to hear of and see all whom he had left behind. He came to Bologna when the town was disturbed by internal feud. There was tumult in the streets, even though the day was a festa, and one of the most joyful in the calendar—the Assumption of the Virgin. The first act of the traveller was not to seek out his friends and brethren and rest from his fatigues, but to make his way to the Piazza, according to his wont, drawing the crowd after him, to preach. A certain Thomas of Spoleto, afterwards an archdeacon of the cathedral of his native town, but at this time a student in the University of Bologna, has left us an account of the scene. He went after the brown friar, all travel-worn and weary, to the square before the little palace, whither almost the whole city followed the stranger—and watched him closely with curious youthful eyes. His bodily presence was mean, the student thought, his person contemptible, his looks unimposing. He stood up amid the intent and eager crowd, where, among peaceable citizens and frightened women and children, were the ruffling retainers of the warring nobles, and those proud and turbulent personages themselves, with swords thrust hastily into their scabbards, and throats hoarse with faction-cries—and took for his text the words, "Angels, Men, Devils." No doubt he had illustrations of all these classes amid the crowd of faces gazing at him, in all the infinite variety of an

age so full of life. The Word of God was so effectual in his mouth, that many nobles, whose dissensions kept the whole local world in misery, and filled the very streets with blood, gave each other their hands for the moment, and made temporary peace in the softening of their hearts. The friar spoke so well, says young Thomas, with the true spirit of a collegian, that many learned men who were present marvelled at a sermon which was not like that of a man uninstructed. The crowd escorted him to his destination, when he had ended, with tears and cries of joy and universal devotion, so that he was considered happy who had been able to touch the hem even of his garments.

He went, as soon as he had thus discharged his first duty, to the palace of the cardinal legate, who received him with the warmest welcome. The story goes on to say, that on turning round (as if it had been in the same street or square), the eyes of the returned missionary encountered a great and sumptuous building, newly erected, and bearing all the evidences of wealth. It was the Convent of the Brothers Minor, the spectators told him. Francis, thunderstruck by this discovery, averted his face with indignant and vehement emotion. "What!" he cried, "is this the house of Christ's poor? Have the Brothers Minor such great and splendid palaces? I do not recognize this as a house of ours, and I cannot acknowledge as my brethren those who live in it." When he had uttered these words, he turned and commanded all who would retain the name of Minor to quit the house, and leave to the rich the things which belonged to them. So indignant was he, and fierce with the sudden anger of the naturally gentle, that the brethren in terror precipitated themselves out of their fine house, even

the sick — among whom was Brother Leo, afterwards one of Francis's closest companions—getting themselves carried out on the shoulders of the strong, and laid down anywhere in the open air, rather than encounter the gentle father's sudden fury. There is something almost comic in this strange scene, at which, no doubt, the crowd looked on gaping and wondering, half compassionate of the houseless sick and discomfited brethren, but wholly on the side of the ascetic founder, and full of approval of the austerities which he exacted.

The Cardinal, however, came in at this moment of confusion and distress. He interposed on behalf of the unfortunates, who lay gasping and pallid on the stones, jolted out of breath by their rapid descent, and trembling before the angry countenance of Francis. He took his friend aside, and represented to him, with all the kindly special pleading of a peacemaker, that size and space could harm no man, that the sick had better air, and the studious more perfect quiet in the large house ; that, after all, it did not belong to the brethren at all, but to the benefactor who had built it for them, and permitted them the use of it ; and, finally, when all other arguments failed to satisfy the disturbed founder, that he himself would remove all difficulties by taking possession of the building in the name of Rome. Subdued but not overcome, Francis permitted the sick folk to be carried back to their quarters. That breath of fresh air, fortunately, in the soft August evening, in the shady street, all cool with its lofty houses, could have done the invalids little harm. But he would not himself enter the too-splendid house. He went away sad and wroth, no doubt feeling that depression which naturally succeeds unwonted anger in a heart

so generous and full of love; and took shelter with the Dominicans, who seem to have had an establishment close by. Perhaps even Ugolino had a share in the vexation and distress which filled his soul. It was his first violent encounter with the world and its influence; and probably by this time, if not before, news had reached him of the relaxation which had crept into the Order during his absence. He dwelt apart, among the Dominicans, for some days, sore and heavy at heart. How different must have been the reception he had dreamed of, after his toilsome journey and long absence! It was the practice of Francis to persuade his brethren to taunt and mortify him in words, by way of cultivating humility in him; but here was a humiliation of a sharper description, and his strength failed before it. One of the Preaching Friars, a pious and prudent man, compassionating not only the solitary lodger in his convent, whose heart was filled with all the pangs of alienation from his own people, but also the abashed and penitent Minors, deprived of their head, took upon him to persuade the Master to return to his disciples. After much discussion and sorrowful resistance on the part of Francis, to whom it seems to have been almost impossible to forgive the sin committed against holy Poverty, the repentant brethren were at last forgiven, but not the erring minister, Giovanni de Stiacchia, who not only had permitted this sumptuous building to be erected, but had set up a school of study more adapted to the atmosphere of Bologna than to the habit and rule of the Order. Francis dissolved the school, enjoined the monks to turn their thoughts more to prayer than to vain accumulations of knowledge, and went his way, leaving pardon behind him, but carrying with him the first sharp sting of division—

the sense that already anarchy had stolen into his Order. It would seem that, as soon as his back was turned, the impenitent Brother Giovanni re-established the school; and, not long after, died in great suffering, ending his life amid a smell of sulphur, which seems to have given great satisfaction to all the historians, and imparted a thrill of terror, no doubt, to those who were endeavouring in other places to break down the too rigid barriers of the Rule.

After this stormy episode came a time of peace. There still remained some weeks of leisure before the assemblage of the Chapter at Michaelmas, and Ugolino, getting over any momentary estrangement that there might have been between them, seems to have carried off his friend to the mountains, as a couple of friends might betake themselves now to the quiet and closer union of a joint excursion. The priest and the monk, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, did not roam about in search of beauty either of nature or art; but they did what came to the same thing. According to the fashion of their century, they retired to a little hermitage among the hills, belonging to the Camaldules, and there dwelt together for some little time in meditation and prayer and spiritual communion. No doubt there was many an hour of serious discussion high up among the chestnut woods, or on the wild edges of the ravines, between the Prince of the Church, who had escaped there to rest from his toils and refresh himself with mortification and vigil, and the humble apostle who had but newly returned from his Eastern mission, and whose heart was sore with the thought of failing influence and backsliding brethren. Ugolino was more lenient to human weakness, in this point, than his companion. Cardinal and great man as he was,

he had probably been disposed to think that a rule of poverty so absolute, and self-abnegation so unflinching, was hard upon flesh and blood. And, no doubt, they discussed the matter between them, and all that was to be done at the approaching Chapter, and the character of Elias, with its many great and statesman-like qualities. Perhaps Ugolino, like a true diplomatist, saw the use of such a man to the Papacy, as well as to the Order; or Francis, when removed from all excitement, was better able to estimate the virtues of a character so unlike his own; for it is clear that these councils held among the solitude of the hills did not produce any very bad effects for the friar who still held sway at the Portiuncula, notwithstanding his temporary punishment, and the indignation of the Founder at his innovations upon the Rule.

When Francis emerged from this leafy seclusion, it must have been with a mind refreshed and comforted by the best solace which life contained to such a man—the affectionate advice and sympathy of his friend. It was a time of the year which he loved to spend in retirement and prayer—the Lent of St. Michael, as we find it described in the old chronicles, which it was his habit to keep with all the solemnity and penitential observances proper to the greater Lent. It was during this season of solitude and prayer, three years later, that the miraculous marks, called the Stigmata, were said to be conferred upon him; and it is natural to suppose that such a holy pause from all his labours, such a sanctuary of quiet, where his prayers might rise and his tears flow, and all the macerations to which he still subjected his weakened body be carried on without let or hindrance, would be doubly sacred to him after his painful journey by land and sea, and banishment

in the blazing East. Fortified by this characteristic retreat, he descended from the hills to his convent just before the assembling of the Chapter. Let us add, that there is about all his dealings with Elias a certain touch of uncertainty in the tradition; and it is hard for us to make out how this brother should have been so much to blame and yet so persistently supported and forgiven. According to the story, however, when the pilgrim appeared at his favourite convent, he perceived that Elias, as he came to welcome him, "wore a careful and elaborate dress"—long hood, wide sleeves, and a rich fringe to his garments—a habit altogether different from the simple shepherd's frock, which had first suggested a distinctive dress for the Order of the poor. Francis said nothing respecting this strange travesty, but he called for a tunic like that of Elias, and putting it on, with exaggerated attention to its picturesque effect, took upon himself, at the same time, all the airs of a severe and lofty dignity: he held his head erect, threw out his chest, and, marching into the convent with pompous steps, saluted all upon his way—not with the "Peace be with you," which was the salutation proper to the brethren, but with a condescending "Good morrow, good people," at which the amazed convent stood aghast. Then, turning to Elias, who stood by, his offended master said, "This is the gait and aspect of a false brother." He then threw off the dainty robe, and resuming his own worn and ragged gown, seated himself in the midst of the brethren, and preached to them on his favourite subjects of poverty and humility, exhorting them to remember that he who was least among them was the greatest of all.

After this, we are told, Francis repealed the inno-

vations which Elias had introduced into the Order, with one exception. What these innovations were, however, it is difficult to make out. The aim of Elias would seem to have been, not any absolute relaxation of the Rule, but rather an attempt to elevate the Order in external weight and influence, requiring a higher position for its officers, and, as a sensible man of the world would be so apt to do, raising up from the first exaggeration of humbleness a corporation which already had become a power in the country. That it was not mere personal comfort he sought is evident from the fact that one of the chief changes he made in the internal economy of the brotherhood was that of forbidding them to eat meat —a piece of asceticism which had not occurred to the founder. Thus, it is apparent that it was not a mere protestation of the flesh against the severity of his rule with which Francis had to do, but the serious effort of an ambitious ascetic—of all innovations the most dangerous. It was the same peril which he had already encountered at Bologna. The corporate spirit which he had himself laboured to create was thus rising up against him, dreaming, not of ease or comfort to the individual, which is the universal popular conception of monkish backsliding, but of splendour and power to the Order. For this, Giovanni de Stiacchia had encouraged the building of the great conventual palace at Bologna, and done his best to fill it with learned clerks, and make of it a centre of instruction. For this, Elias had taken upon himself the common signs of worldly dignity as vicar and temporary head of an important corporation. They were men wise in their generation, impatient of that simplicity which went so far beyond their wisdom, and incapable of comprehending how much more valuable,

even for outward success, are the original impulses of pure and true religious feeling, than all the hackneyed ways into which worldly wisdom has fallen since the beginning of the world.

And it is very comprehensible how Francis should have hesitated to repeal that one ordinance about the eating of meat, which seemed to be, though it really was not, in conformity with his spirit of mortification and renunciation of all things. He could not forbid anything that seemed an effort towards greater self-denial: the reader feels that he was perplexed by it, vexed in his friendly reasonable soul, anxious to believe that it was an inspiration from above, and yet within himself revolted by a severity which was at once out of place in point of fact, and contrary to the letter of the Gospel—"Eat what is set before you." It was this discrepancy, probably, which most affected his loyal and literal spirit. But he hesitated to deprive his brethren of the joy of giving up something more for Christ. He made short work with their great houses, their soft raiment, their attempts at ecclesiastical pomp; but a new piece of self-denial, however unwise, was a thing he had not the heart to put a stop to. His own example would have stood in the way, in the first place; for who so utterly self-denying, who so greedy of privation, as himself?

In the Chapter which followed, the historians of the Order assert that Elias was set aside from his place, and Pietro de Catanio, one of the earliest of Francis's followers, elected in his stead. There is even an elaborate description of the homage done by the Founder himself to the new Minister-General, which, however, our Bollandist critic regards with very sceptical eyes, and indeed declines to believe except under the strictest limitations. We cannot pretend to examine

the story in elaborate detail, as does the learned Jesuit; but he would seem to have the full support of fact in his opinion that Francis never did lay the sway and regulation of his Order out of his own hand; and that it was only as vicar during his frequent absences that either Pietro or Elias ever ruled. In this light it is, however, reasonable enough to suppose that, by way of example to the brethren, Francis himself may have proclaimed his readiness to obey his substitute, during the times when he, a simple missionary, was incapable of exercising, in his own person, the general authority. Pietro lived for so short a time afterwards, that it is natural there should be a doubt thrown upon his actual holding of the place to which he was appointed; for Elias, who had preceded, also succeeded him; and his short reign looks like a mere interpolation upon the much longer and more important vicariat of the other. All this, however, we are bound to add, is found only in the more recent histories. The contemporaries of Francis are silent upon the subject, perhaps because these controversies and the replacement of one officer by another were not so important in their eyes as they seem by later lights; or perhaps (which is quite possible) because the brethren, with that *esprit du corps* which already existed in so high a degree among them, would not betray the dissensions, which had already broken the peace of the Order, to an evil-speaking and sarcastic world.

We have already referred to the account given in the *Fioretti* of the visit of an angel to the convent, for the express purpose of examining Elias upon this question of abstinence from meat—a story in which a certain curious suppressed sarcasm, on the part of the angel-visitor, mingles strangely with the picturesque but homely details of the narrative, in which

there can be no doubt we have a more clear and real picture of how life passed among the brethren in their solitude, six hundred years ago, than anything to which the imagination of to-day could reach. Francis is praying in the wood, absorbed in communion with his Master, yet not beyond the possibility of being recalled by an appeal from the convent, and with a certain undercurrent of watchfulness over the brethren keeping its place within him, notwithstanding the long, silent ecstasies of devotion, which neither monk nor angel cares to disturb. Burly Masseo is near the gate, ready to answer any summons, and not disinclined for a moment's gossip—a kindly, garrulous brother; and ambitious Elias in his cell, occupied with great projects, and not to be disturbed with impunity. While they are all thus fulfilling the duties most congenial to their nature in the silence of the religious place comes the impatient knocking, which called from Brother Masseo that little lecture on the subject which we have before quoted. The youth who stands at the door thus states his object:—

"'I am in great haste, and therefore knock I thus loudly, for I have to make a journey, and am come hither to speak to Brother Francis; but he is now in the wood in prayer, and therefore I will not trouble him; but go thou and tell Brother Elias that I would ask of him one question, for I know that he is very learned.' Brother Masseo went and bade Brother Elias to go to the youth; but he was angry, and would not go; whereupon Brother Masseo knew not what to do, nor what to answer him. Should he say, 'Brother Elias cannot come,' he would lie; should he say, how he was angry, and would not come, he feared to set a bad example. And since, in the meanwhile, Brother Masseo delayed to return, the youth knocked a second time as at the first, and soon after Brother Masseo returned to the gate, and said to the youth, 'Thou hast not observed my bidding in thus knocking.' The youth answered, 'Brother

Elias will not come to me; but go thou, and say to Brother Francis that I am come to speak to him; but because I am loth to hinder him from prayer, bid him that he send to me Brother Elias.' And then Brother Masseo went to Brother Francis, who was praying in the wood with his face upraised to heaven, and told him the message of the youth, and the reply of Brother Elias :——and that youth was an angel of God in form of man.

"Then St. Francis, not moving from the spot, nor lowering his face, said to Brother Masseo, 'Go thou and say to Brother Elias that, by his obedience, he go instantly to that youth.' Brother Elias, fearing the obedience of St. Francis, went, much angered, to the gate, and with great haste and noise opened it, and said to the youth, 'What wilt thou?' The youth answered, 'Beware, brother, that thou be not angry, as thou appearest to be; for anger hinders the mind, and suffers it not to discern the truth.' Brother Elias said, 'Tell me what thou wouldest of me.' The youth answered, 'I ask thee if it is lawful for a follower of the holy Gospel to eat of that which is set before him, as Christ bade His disciples; and I ask thee, further, if it is lawful for any man to put forth aught contrary to the liberty of the Gospel.'

"Brother Elias answered proudly, 'I know well how to answer thee, but I will not: go on thy business.'

"The youth said, 'I should know better how to answer this question than thou.' Then Brother Elias, being angered with fury, shut the gate and departed. Then he began to think of the said question, and to doubt of it within himself; and knew not how to answer it, because he was Vicar of the Order, and had ordained and made customs contrary to the Gospel and contrary to the Rule of St. Francis—that no brother of the Order should eat meat; so that the said question was expressly directed against him. Whereupon not knowing how to make it clear to himself, and remembering the modesty of the youth, and that he had said that he knew how to answer that question better than he did, he returned to the gate and opened it, to ask the youth the aforesaid question; but he had already departed, because the pride of Brother Elias was not worthy to speak with an angel. When this was done, St. Francis, to whom the whole matter had been revealed of God, returned from the wood and boldly with loud voice rebuked

Brother Elias, saying, 'Ill hast thou done, proud Brother Elias, to drive from us the holy angels who come to teach us. I tell thee, I fear greatly lest thy pride should cause thee to end thy life outside the Order.'"

We might search in vain through the laborious comments of the Bollandist or formal annals of the Order, for so sharply-touched and distinct a picture of the proud and impatient ascetic, in whom, notwithstanding, there are movements of humility, and who is capable of thinking better of it, though too late Elias and his life, and all the circumstances of his career, must have been well known to the anonymous chronicler of the *Fioretti;* and we are, accordingly, able to receive the sketch as a personal portrait, without hesitation, although no doubt that very knowledge of his subsequent life which makes the portrait more distinct, weakens our belief in the recorded prophecy, which can only have been published after it had turned out true. At the same time, the character of Elias must have commanded a certain respect from, and even have touched at certain sympathetic points the open-hearted Francis, who evidently could not condemn him altogether. By times, no doubt, the conviction must have forced itself upon the mind of the saint that so restless and masterful a spirit could not remain in the humblest of Orders, but he was ever anxious to retain and recall him by unfailing tenderness, and clung to him with evident personal affection. Here is a letter addressed to Elias in his capacity as Vicar-General, which breathes the very spirit of the gentle apostle.

"To his reverend father in Christ, Brother Elias, Vicar-General of the Order, Brother Francis sends greeting in the Lord.

"My brother, God give you His holy blessing. Be patient and gentle in all things. If the brethren occasion

you grief, cast it upon God. In this only shall I recognize you as a true servant of God, if you lead back to Him in mercy the brother who has gone astray, and cease not to love even him who has committed serious sins. If out of fear such a one should not dare to pray for pardon, let it be your part to ask him if he wishes to be forgiven. . . . In all that you have to do, I recommend to you charity and patience. You will have to be the support of many, and the burden on your shoulders will be great and heavy: it is the burden of many souls. In the old law the high priest carried, written upon the breastplate,—which, hanging from his shoulders, rested on his heart,—the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, by which we are taught, that the superior should carry his subordinates in his heart, even as he carries them on his shoulders; for if he ceases to love them, they will become intolerable to him. When Jesus Christ our Lord would give the care of the Church to Peter, before He gave up His sheep into his hands, He examined him as to his love. Take care, then, that no brother sin; but if he sins, let him not leave your presence without having felt your pity and received his punishment. . . . Watch, warn, labour, feed the flock; love, wait, and fear. Farewell in the Lord."

A very similar letter of warning and instruction has also come down to us, addressed to another Vicar-General, no doubt Pietro de Catanio, in both of which, it will be perceived, Francis, though addressing each as "reverend father" (they were both priests, which he himself was not), speaks with unquestionable authority, and a certain severe yet gentle dignity. Nothing can be more clearly indicative of the fact that the supreme rule was always in his own hands. It is thus he addresses his other vicar—one of his first disciples; a man, there can be little doubt, older and of much higher position than himself.

"The Lord bless and keep you in His holy charity. In all your actions, my brother, I recommend to you patience; and whatsoever hindrance may meet you, on the part of the brethren or of others, even if they go so far as to lay hands

on you, you should accept all as a favour, as if you had desired that, and nothing else. Love those who act thus, and desire nothing more of them, unless the Lord will grant you more. Let the sole end of your love for them be, to make them better Christians. This is the mark by which I shall know whether you love the Lord and me, His servant and yours. If a brother has sinned in the world, however great his fault may be, if he has once been brought before you, let him not depart till he has felt your mercy. If he does not ask pardon, do you ask him if he desires it; if, after having refused it, he appears a thousand times in your presence, love him more than you love me, in order to draw him back by that means to goodness; and have always pity on such men. Make it clearly known to the Guardians that this is how you mean to act. Let the brethren who know the sin of one among them, take care of doing anything to shame the culprit, or of reproaching him; on the contrary, let them conduct themselves tenderly towards him, and hide the fault of their brother: those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

"If a brother, at the instigation of our enemy, should fall into mortal sin, let him be bound by obedience to seek the help of his Guardian; and let the Guardian be bound in his turn, in the name of obedience, to send him to the Minister; and let the Minister provide for his necessities mercifully, as he would should be done to himself in a similar case; and let no one have the power of imposing upon that brother any other penance than this, 'Go and sin no more.' Thus act, and farewell."

Thus tenderly did the founder of the Order legislate for the general mass of the brethren: thus straitly, with a certain austere gentleness, full of authority, did he bind the highest officers among them. Tenderness itself breathes in the injunction; but never a Cæsar spoke more imperatively; never was the viceroy of a despot more closely held to the letter of the law.

The only other remarkable point about the Chapter of 1220, held on Michaelmas Day, is the appearance

there of Antonio of Padua, a saint scarcely inferior to Francis himself in the annals of the Order, and one of his most devoted followers. We may conclude this chapter with the following brief letter addressed to him by Francis, probably about this time, and out of which there seems to breathe some reminiscence of the troubles at Bologna. Once more austere authority, quite uncompromising in its self-assertion, mingles with his usual gentleness, as he issues his commands:—

"To my beloved brother Antonio. Brother Francis greets him in the Lord.

"My will is that you explain to the brethren the teachings of holy theology, but in such a manner, however (and this a desire above all), that the spirit of holy prayer should not be dulled in you nor in others, according to the Rule which we profess. Farewell."

Thus the necessities of his office moulded not only the style, but the character of the apostle of Assisi. In himself, the tenderest, gentlest, most open-hearted of men, rendering willing obedience to the superior of the convent, wherever it was, in which he happened to be, avoiding all appearance of vainglory, of superior ease or rank, electing even his companion as he travelled to be his superior,—as soon as the affairs of the Order were concerned, he became imperial in his tone. It was the great work of his life, one for which he was specially commissioned by God; and that responsibility he could transfer to no one. Hot indignation flashed across his mild face when any attempt to change the spirit or character of his work became manifest: even then, as we have seen in his treatment of Elias, he imputed no evil motives, and did justice to what better meaning might be in the offender; but he would suffer no tampering with the grand object of his life.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THIRD ORDER.

It was in the year 1221 that the Third Order of the Brothers Minor came into being. After the Chapter held at Michaelmas, which we have just described, Francis had resumed his apostolic labours. He went no more abroad—perhaps because the great mission on which he had set his heart was so far fulfilled—perhaps because of the dawnings of change in the Order—and even perhaps because so many labours and mortifications had begun to tell upon his bodily strength; but in Italy his work was incessant. Sometimes, we are told, he preached in as many as five towns or hamlets in the course of one day; and all the towns and villages of Umbria, the great baronial houses, the little hamlets, every centre of habitation in that full and richly populated country, received the wandering saint. It is needless to add, that his preaching was attended by constant miracles, and that the sick and unfortunate crowded on his path to see him, to touch, to get help and succour from mere contact with his robe or the passing of his shadow. The miracles themselves always retain, in the midst of the usual conventional wonders, stray touches here and there of tender human kindness and feeling, which identify them as his. Once when he was passing a great feudal stronghold, a little daughter of the lord of the place, deaf

and dumb from her birth, was sent to him that he might heal her. The child stood by the side of the preacher —one can fancy with what wistful looks of wonder— while he preached to the crowd of retainers, all of whom doubtless were open-mouthed with anxiety as to the result. When the sermon was over, he turned to the little mute, and bade her go and ask her father for a site for a convent upon his lands. The story takes all its character from this mode of proving the success of the attempt to heal. Francis had put off for himself all the sweetness and consolation of natural relationship; but yet he knew by instinct that it was the father's ear, and none other, which should hear the first word from his child's mouth; and that nature, in her way, was holy, and fair, and good, though a harder path, which was not that of nature, a thorny road above the common, flowery levels of humanity, was that which he had chosen for himself.

This principle was the very heart of the new or third Order. We have already given the legendary account of its origin, which is, that the preaching of Francis was so effectual on a special occasion, that the whole population of a little town or castle rose up to follow the preacher, as with one impulse. He made their ungodliness, their sinfulness, and absorption in worldly cares, intolerable to them by his burning words, and the universal compunction burst all bonds of prudence. But Francis was himself too reasonable to permit such a wholesale sacrifice. He knew that the world must still go on and fulfil its every-day labours, whatever might be suggested by the enthusiasm of a moment; and he was not himself led away by any fanatical impulse of proselytism. When the excited people wept and besought him to permit them to follow him, he silenced them with tranquillizing words.

"Remain in your homes," he said, "and I will find for you a way of serving God." The critical Jesuit, though he does not accept this legend in all its picturesqueness, yet allows the fact of a great and sudden popular awakening under the preaching of Francis. The first idea of the people seems to have been that they should separate, husbands from wives, and parents from children, and retire into the cloister; but even in their own minds this wild resolution began to look impracticable after the first outburst. When the married women, and girls affianced or intended by their parents for secular life, came to themselves, in their excitement they threw themselves upon the charity of the preacher, who had aroused them from their common-place calm. "What shall we others do?" they cried piteously. "We cannot lead your life. Tell us if there is any way by which we can save our souls?" And in similar terms the married men besought the Frati. "We have wives," they said, "who will not let us go. Tell us, then, in what way we can keep the path of health." It was in answer to these entreaties that the Third Order was instituted. "He persuaded them to remain at home, and to live there in the fear of God and the practice of Christian virtues, promising to make out for them, in a short time, a form which they could keep without leaving the condition of life to which God had called them." Thus it was the object of the Third Order to meet the needs of devout persons still living, and compelled by duty to live, "in the world:" people who could not aspire to what was then considered the way of perfection, the life of the cloister,—but with hearts careful and troubled about many things, with husbands and wives to think of, and houses and lands, with the care and maintenance of children and dependants

upon their shoulders, and all the responsibilities of secular life,—were yet inspired by a desire to serve God above all.

In modern times we are apt to think that these are the happy in this earth; and when we belong to the class, we are tempted to look down with a certain sense of superiority from our eminence of experience upon the solitaries who have stood apart from life. It was otherwise in the thirteenth century. In the belief of the world then, it was the virgin souls in their retirement who had chosen the steeper, harder, more exalted way; it was they who were the nearest Christ: all that the secular married people could do was to toil after them painfully, feeling the clog of a hundred cares, which restrained them from the perfect devotion of the cloister. Francis was the first monastic leader who had thought of those poor rich, happy folk as worth consideration at all. The exquisite naturalness and humanity of the man made it apparent to him that, after all, monks and nuns could never form the staple of the race; and that the purity, honesty, and piety of that race were as deeply important as the highest attainments of recluse sanctity: we do not say more deeply important, for he was not above the prejudices of his age and condition. The Rule of the Third Order is simply that of a high-toned religious life, cast in the lines which were familiar to the time, with perhaps what may appear to us a superabundance of fasting and penitential observances, but nothing inconsistent with the ordinary conditions of humanity. Before admitting any member into the Order, an investigation was to be made into his life, especially in respect to personal integrity and the state of his relations with his neighbours. If a man was found unrighteously possessed of the goods of

another, or if he were unreconciled to his enemies, he was ineligible, until full restitution and peace had been made—a stipulation of incalculable importance in the existing state of the world. The vow exacted was a simple but solemn promise to keep God's commandments. "I promise and vow to God, the Blessed Virgin, our father St. Francis, and all the saints of Paradise, to keep all the commandments of God, during the entire course of my life, and to make satisfaction for the transgressions which I may have committed against the Rule and manner of life of the Order of Penitents, instituted by St. Francis, according to the will of the visitor of that Order, when I am admitted into it."

Such was the vow of the Tertiary, which multitudes of people throughout the whole known world hastened to take. The secondary requirements of the Order were such as have been adopted over and over again at periods of reformation and religious revival. The Penitents were called upon to avoid balls, festivals, the theatre, and all manner of vain amusements, as if they had been Puritans. The brethren were forbidden to bear arms, except in the case of danger to their country or the Church. They were to avoid all solemn engagements, or oaths, except in matters of necessity, for the faith, or for indispensable business, such as bearing testimony. Lawsuits were also forbidden among them, and all the arts of conciliation and peacemaking encouraged. When we add, that it was enjoined upon them to fast often, to eat no meat four days in the week, this is only to say that they belonged to the Middle Ages—a period at which modern ideas on that subject, as on many other subjects, were unknown. Neither need it bewilder us to find once more in the form of prayer

used by the Tertiaries, when for any feasible reason they were prevented from using the breviary, the same simple theory of devotion which we have already seen to be characteristic of the mind of Francis. To them, as to his monks in their first beginning, he gave the Paternoster for their liturgy. They were to repeat it seven times for matins, and seven for each canonical hour, followed by a *Gloria Patri*. Seven times over the Lord's Prayer—was not this to use it as a charm, and to lose all sense of its divine meaning? But it would be premature to condemn Francis, or even to attribute this simplicity and much repetition solely to the character of his own mind. He had lived much among the poor, and knew their habits and ways. He had lived among busy people, men and women, eaten up from morning till night with the cares of the world. He knew how difficult it would be in either case to insist upon the use of any form of prayer which was not absolutely familiar to them. But no shepherd upon Apennine, no housewife among her daily toils, no merchant in the stress of business, but could bethink himself or herself of the Lord's Prayer. And the object of the founder was to attract and gently draw these secular persons from over-occupation with the things of this world, and to interest them in another. They were not only to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God, but they were to recognize the vow that bound them, by a certain continual homage of the spirit, and recollection of the world unseen. Thus, for the simple and for the ignorant, as well as for the great and learned, the Rule was framed—wide enough in its limits, simple enough in its requirements, to admit both.

In every place where a congregation of the Third

Order existed, there was a visitor, who was bound to be a priest, and Brother Minor of the First Order, and whose duty it was to oversee and inspect the penitents, and keep them in the way of life. Each member, at his death, was entitled to a funeral attended by all his brethren, and to those prayers and masses which to the mediæval mind made dying easy. There were three grand Masses said solemnly for the Brothers and Sisters alive and dead, every year; and among themselves in every community, each one was bound to say a Pater for the departed or departing soul—a kind of spiritual assurance against, not death, but that which follows after death, which is a well-known part of the religious economy of the age. They were all Brethren and Sisters, in the midst of a struggling world. And it may easily be perceived what a wonderful bond was theirs—a tie which connected people of every class and condition, binding them to mutual succour and support; and how incalculable was the tacit aid given by this mass of lay supporters to the action of the consecrated brethren, the Friars Minor themselves. We are told in the *Histoire des Ordres Monastiques*, that this very cause brought distress upon the community. They were considered as defenders of the Holy See, and, as such, suffered whenever any feud arose between Pope and Emperor—the secular and the spiritual powers. It was said by a rueful legislator, who found the Franciscans, with this mighty Tertiary backing, much in his way, that Francis had established a society in which he received all kinds of people, so that there was scarcely a soul in Christendom whose name was not upon its muster-roll. The Emperor Frederick II., we are told by the same monkish authority, persecuted them wherever they were found; and so early as the year 1227, Pope Gregory IX

(once Cardinal Ugolino, our old friend), defended the Tertiaries by a special bull, in which he commanded the bishops and archbishops of Italy to interfere in their favour, that they might not be laden with increased taxes, but should pay only what others paid. On the other hand, the Third Order rose into instant distinction and importance, and was joined by a crowd of noble and powerful persons Saint Louis of France, his mother and wife, were all members of it. And so was St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and many other princesses, who, after lives of much Christian charity and fervent devotion in their natural sphere, transplanted their zeal and sanctity into the stricter enclosure of the professed sisterhood. Wherever the preaching friars penetrated in their absolute poverty, breaking upon the slumbering imagination and torpid faith of the world as with a sign from heaven, the laity crowded into this Religion, which was possible—which did not require the renunciation of other duties, and yet linked them to the holiest men on earth, and gave them the support of a definite Rule. It was the first reappearance in the Church, since its full hierarchical establishment, of the democratic element—the Christian people, as distinguished from the simple sheep to be fed, and souls to be ruled. The humblest Tertiary had a certain place in the Church, which the proudest prince had not possessed before.

This great institution, however, was not the astute and elaborate scheme of a great ecclesiastical intelligence, but the sudden device of a most tender Christian spirit, thinking chiefly of the comfort and profit of individuals. It seems doubtful whether Francis was even aware what a fruitful idea he had inaugurated. His fertile and inventive mind threw out great suggestions unconsciously. The female

branch of his Order was instituted, it is evident, solely because of the one young enthusiast in whose piety he interested himself with all the warmth which belonged to his nature; and the Third Order sprang into being in the same curiously accidental way, that the brimmings-over of a sudden and general spiritual impression might not be lost. Without knowing it, thinking only what was the best way to keep alive that suddenly aroused anxiety for divine things, and to secure the salvation of all those eager Italian men and women about him whose burdens he understood, and whose natural duties he approved, the humble monk threw forth an organization more powerful, influential, and universal than any Freemasonry. But no thought of political power, or the future splendour of his Order, was in his mind. What he thought of was the conversion of souls, the service of God, and, above all things else, the imitation of Christ.

We are not informed whether the awakened population of the village or stronghold in which the idea first originated were satisfied at once by being enrolled in the Rule which was specially constructed with a view to their needs. The first person named as admitted to it is a certain Luca, a merchant, who had retired, probably, from one of the greater cities of Umbria to the little town of Giansi, where he did his best to make up for a hard money-making life by universal charity and kindness. We are told that he went out to meet Francis on his entrance to Giansi, much as Zaccheus met our Lord; and that he and his wife Bonna were received at once into the obedience of the new Rule. The next member we hear of by name is a noble Roman, Matteo de Rubeo, in whose house Francis lodged a little later

—the father of the future Pope Nicolas IV. When the saint was a guest in Rubeo's palace, Nicolas was an infant; and we are told that Francis, taking him in his arms, blessed him, and prophesied his future rank. "This little one shall not be a brother of our society, but its protector," he said to the happy and wondering father; "he shall not be a son, but a father, under whose shadow our family shall live and rejoice."

An association so full of spiritual life and meaning, had not, however, need of the protection of any Pope in its vigorous beginning. It grew and flourished by natural right, and gathered recruits from every side. Wherever Francis himself preached, crowds rushed to take the simple vow and declare themselves on the Lord's side in the midst of an evil world; and the brethren, as they went forth upon their missionary labours, carried with them this new code by which to identify and bind together their converts, and consolidate their spiritual kingdom. The picturesque features which belong to it are rather those of the century than of the movement; for that movement itself is little more than the perennial working of religious earnestness, which is the same in all ages. From the time of the Apostles until now, every renewed wave of spiritual life has resulted in the formation of a peculiar people, a Church within the Church, a religious commonwealth abjuring all common gaieties, pomps, and pleasures, and publicly announcing itself as the army of the Lord. Every reformer has essayed, with more or less success, to do what Francis did. The Tertiaries were the Puritans of that distant age, the Society of Methodists, the Children of the new light. Sad-coloured garments, oft-recurring devotions, the banishment of all external signs of gaiety, are the general features which strike

the careless observer, and prove to him the sameness of all religious effort; but underneath these are characteristics still more Catholic. It is upon the Apostolic model that Francis builds; and that was but a Christian recommencement of the old struggle—as old as the world—to make God's commandments the supreme rule of life—a struggle continually failing, yet, thank God, continually renewed. It may be possible that in all ages the spirit of this perpetual effort has been most fully visible in humble souls who wore no livery of outward holiness—the "seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal," though God's prophet knew them not; but yet in all ages, the leaders of Christianity have set their hearts upon this lofty dream of a world made Christian—a community refraining from war, both covert and open, laying aside the sword, and not less laying aside that sharper scourge than the sword, the keen edge of self-interest which cuts the bond between brother and brother; without strife, without litigation, without the meaner evils of levity and display; in which a man's word should be as sure as a hundred oaths, in which there should be no conspiracies, no secret combinations, nothing but justice, and friendship, and truth. Such an ideal has shaped the thoughts of the philosopher no less than of the saint; but to the saint the way is less hopeless than to any secular dreamer. It is the old way, trodden by patriarchs and apostles, opened in all its fulness by the sacred footsteps of the Saviour. Thus Francis regarded it as did Paul, and as every succeeding reformer has done. And in the thirteenth century the world was still young, and the rule of the absolute was not over.

It is curious to mark how the same fears and hopes descend from age to age, with an entire

reversal of every surrounding circumstance. Antichrist, which Protestants have so often personified in our days under the figure of Rome, was in the days of Francis looked for with vague terror, not so clearly embodied, but perhaps still more actively feared. It might be Mahomet, it might be the obscure and unintelligible heresy which was being crushed by persecution among the Vaudois hills; but whatever it was, Francis in his Third Order trained an army against it of devout Catholics, who believed in the Pope as they believed in their own souls, and prepared themselves with all the fervency of conviction to resist that Antichrist, and make the cause of God prosper in the world—just as Protestant Societies, Evangelical Alliances, every kind of modern association, have banded themselves in recent days against the Antichrist at Rome, nothing doubting that theirs was the first mission against it, and their identification of it the only true one. Thus fashion changes, and the perennial stream glides into new channels, but yet remains in its essence always the same.

The Order of Tertiaries made, as we have already said, great progress over all Christendom, and soon numbered the very highest and best of living potentates and nobles among its members; but it was adopted first by the surrounding towns and villages, by the compatriots of the founder—the people who saw him day by day, and knew what kind of a life and work his was. There seems to have been a special outburst of zeal at Florence, where the inhabitants threw themselves into the new Rule with the same fervour which they afterwards displayed under the preaching of Savonarola, and demonstrated their zeal by building hospitals and convents—one of

which, we are told, still existed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, in the Piazza of Santa Maria Novella. When the first disciples were received into the Order, they are described, as it is usual in conventual phraseology to describe the entrance of a new member, as "receiving the habit;" but it does not appear that the dress of the Tertiaries was ever generally worn; for it was at the option of the visitor of each local society to grant dispensations in regard to this and other superficial matters; and it is clear that the compulsory adoption of a uniform dress would have infringed the liberty of so large a mass of people, living in the "world," and in full discharge of all its duties, to an inconceivable extent. "There are districts," says the French historian of the Monastic Orders, in the eighteenth century, "principally in Spain and Italy, where many Tertiaries of both sexes publicly wear the habit of the Order, which consists of a gown of brown or grey cloth, bound round at the waist by a white cord, with a mantle of the same stuff; the men wearing sometimes a hood, sometimes a hat, and the women a white veil." But this was quite exceptional, and nowhere common. In short, the Order was not intended to be marked out from the world, but rather to leaven that world—forming a link between the secular and the ecclesiastical. As was to be expected, its more fervent members drifted continually into the stricter enclosure of the first Order of Brothers Minor, or formed new branches of the great stock. Those who had become Tertiaries when bound by marriage or by important occupations in the world, retired to the ready cloister when widowhood or old age came upon them; and women who had adopted the easier Rule in their youth followed, when they had full command of themselves, the

same example. The "Begghards," or Béguines, of Flanders are mentioned as one of the offshoots thus formed, along with a number of other distinguished Orders—the Capucins, the Urbanists, the Brothers and Sisters Hospitallers, and many more. It was not, however, in this intention that the third Franciscan Order was formed. Its purpose was, in all simplicity, in all sincerity, to promote the purity of common life; to sanctify, by active practice of all the Christian virtues, the troubled and disturbed existence which most men and women have to live in the midst of an uneasy world; and to make all work practicable, and all patience possible, by impressing upon the minds of the labouring and heavy-laden a constant sense of the aid of Christ, and the presence, in the midst of all their mortal enemies, oppressions, and perils, of that one unfailing though unseen Friend.

CHAPTER XIV.

FINAL CONFIRMATION OF THE RULE.

DURING the Chapter of the year 1220, the first after the return of Francis from the East, in which he had been troubled by the first germs of insubordination, there arrived a little band of missionaries still more travel-worn than himself, and less cheerful. These were the missionaries to Germany, whose rueful, half-comic story we have already recorded—who had got themselves into dire trouble, and procured their own expulsion from the country they went to evangelize by the smiling good-humour with which they answered *Ja*, not knowing what it meant, to the question whether they were heretics. From such rude Teutonic greeting, from prison and hardship, they came back worn out and discouraged with their woeful story. Such a repulse had the natural consequence of stirring up a certain eagerness in the whole Order for the conversion of Germany. But this was not to be accomplished by the immediate renewal of the mission under the same hopeless conditions: for Francis was wise for his community, however rashly-daring he might be in his own person; and the lives of his brethren were dear to him, as well as the success of their work. The immediate cause of this first serious failure was supposed to be the want of any public and published confirmation of the Rule by

Papal authority. It had been confirmed by word of mouth;—once almost privately—the second time before a great Council, which formally acknowledged the Order; but not by any written document or bull addressed to the whole Church. It thus became necessary to sustain the Order by unmistakeable evidences of approval from Rome; and this was not a work which could be done in haste. It will be evident, however, to the modern reader, that the real cause of the failure of these simple missionaries was not the unlucky affirmation which stamped them heretics, but their ignorance of the German language; though that does not seem to have been reckoned among their difficulties, the age being, on the whole, careless of such trifles. Perhaps, however, by this time, some travellers from Germany had found admission into the Order; for the mind of Francis seems to have been bent wholly upon settling what appeared to him the first and greatest hindrance by procuring a written confirmation of his Rule. It is a curious evidence of the slow communication between one part of the Continent and another, that the proceedings of the great Council held at the Lateran in 1215 should not have been sufficiently known across the Alps in 1219 to secure toleration for the brethren, to whom Pope and Council had given their approval. But so, it would seem, it was.

This year, however, there occurred a strange scene, belonging rather to the private than the public life of Francis, upon which the legend dwells fondly, and even the critical historian makes a sympathetic pause. Agnes, the sister of Clara—the little Agnes who, ten years before, had followed her sister to the convent, and whom all the strength of her warlike relations could not, as we have already related, tear from that

sanctuary—was sent by the head of the Order to Florence, to preside over a new community of Poor Ladies, probably in the convent which the zeal of the Florentine burghers, members of the Third Order, had just built for their professed sisters. Agnes cannot have been more than twenty at the time this office was conferred upon her, and it is difficult to apply our modern conventional idea of the state of disappointed feeling, soured life, and languid vitality which drive women into the cloister, to this young Abbess, setting out, no doubt to her own consciousness, on a noble and worthy mission, fulfilling the highest duty possible to a woman; nor is it easy to refrain from sympathy with such a maiden flower of humanity consecrated from its earliest blossoming to God. There is no connection in the legend between the solemn feast which we are about to relate and the departure of Agnes on her mission; yet, from a brief reference at the end of the narrative, it seems probable that it was intended as a consolation to Clara after her separation from the sister to whom she had been so closely united. The story of the dinner given by the brethren at the Portiuncula to their sisters from St. Damiano is thus fully told in the *Fioretti*:—

"St. Francis, when he was at Assisi, ofttimes visited St. Chiara, giving her holy teaching. She, on her part, had an exceeding great desire of eating once with him; but though she prayed him many times, he would never do her this pity; and his companions, seeing this longing desire of St. Chiara, said to St. Francis, 'Father, it seemeth us that this sternness is not according to the divine love, that thou hearkenest not to St. Chiara, a virgin so holy, beloved of God, in so small a matter as is the eating with thee, especially considering that she, through thy preaching, hath given up the pomps and riches of the world. And, of a truth, had she asked of thee a greater favour than this, thou oughtest to

do it for thy spiritual offspring.' Then St. Francis answered, 'Seemeth it you that I should hearken to her?' His companions answered, 'Father, yes; it is a worthy thing that thou shouldest do her this favour and pity.' Then said St. Francis, 'As it seemeth to you, so also it seemeth to me. But, in order that she may be the more comforted, I will that this feast be made in the church of St. Mary of the Angels, because she hath been now long time cloistered in St. Damian; so that it will rejoice her to see the church of St. Mary, where she took the vows and became the bride of Jesus Christ; and there we will eat together in the name of God.' And when the day appointed for this arrived, St. Chiara went forth from the convent with one companion, and accompanied by the companions of St. Francis, came to St. Mary of the Angels; and when she had devoutly saluted the Blessed Virgin before the altar where she had taken the veil, they took her to see the place until it was the hour of dinner. And meanwhile, St. Francis caused the table to be spread on the level earth, as he was wont to do. And when it was the hour of dinner, they placed St. Francis to sit beside St. Chiara, and one of the companions of St. Francis with the companion of St. Chiara; and then all the rest of the company gathered themselves humbly round the table. And, during the first course, St. Francis began to speak of God so sweetly, so loftily, so marvellously, that the abundance of the divine grace descending upon them from on high, they were all rapt in God. And, being thus rapt with eyes and hands upraised to heaven, the men of Assisi and of Bettona and those of the neighbouring country saw that St. Mary of the Angels and all the place, and the wood which then came close up to the spot, burned fiercely, and it seemed as though there were a great fire which ravaged the church, and the place and the wood together; whereupon the men of Assisi, with great haste, ran down to quench the flames, believing that everything was on fire. But when they came to the spot and found nothing burning, they entered in and found St. Francis, with St. Chiara and all their company, rapt in contemplation of God, and sitting round that humble table. Whereupon they certainly understood that this had been a divine and not a material fire which God had made appear miraculously, to show forth and signify the fire of divine love within, which consumed the hearts of these holy brethren and nuns; wherefore they departed, with great

comfort in their heart, and with great edification. Then, after a great while, St. Francis returning to himself with St. Chiara and the others, and feeling much comforted by the spiritual food, they cared but little for the food of the body. And thus, that blessed repast being accomplished, St. Chiara, well accompanied, returned to St. Damian; whereat the sisters, when they saw her, had great pleasure, for they feared lest St. Francis should have sent her to rule some other convent, as he had already sent Sister Agnes, her holy sister, as abbess, to rule the convent Di Monticelli, at Florence; and St. Francis once had said to St. Chiara, 'Prepare thyself, if need be that I send thee into another place;' and she, as a daughter of holy obedience, had made reply, 'Father, I am ever prepared to go whithersoever thou mayest send me.' And therefore the sisters rejoiced greatly when she returned; and St. Chiara remained there thenceforward much comforted."

This was Clara's only meeting, for other purposes than those of ghostly counsel, with her friend and father; and one can readily imagine the gentle excitement that moved those cloistered maidens as, with unaccustomed steps, they went down the hill to the Portiuncula. Clara had been but seventeen when she made her last eventful journey to the shrine of St. Mary of the Angels, on that spring night ten years before, when her fate was decided. Her last recollection of the humble little church must have shown like a wonderful dream at this distance—the brethren with all their blazing lights, the darkness and silence outside, the falling of her pretty curls which meant so much, the fluttering heart of the girl-novice as she put on the harsh garment which implied and demonstrated an utter change of existence. No doubt it was a strange pleasure to the experienced nun to see in the calm daylight, in the assured religious quiet of her existence, the scene of that wonderful crisis of her youth. She was but twenty-seven still, and

Francis not more than ten years older. The two might have sat at how different a table, with ties of another kind between them. As the friars, with friendly zeal, showed their sisters over the church, and the enclosure about it, did such a thought ever glance across the minds of the man or the maiden? We have no reason to suppose it ever did; for all the thoughts of earth had been long hushed for both in the silence of the cloister, and the pure and simple record has nothing in it but a saintly communion in the love of God. It is the fashion of our modern and Protestant intelligence to ask such questions, and to look with a certain regret upon the dedicated lives. Yet it would be hard to say why. Had Francis been as his own father, who at this distance would have cared to inquire into his history? And even Clara, to whom his work was not possible, has left a fuller and more important list of spiritual descendants behind her than would have been possible had she been the wife of a mediæval Baron, "happy" as we reckon it. Theirs was no barren life, as we are apt to suppose the lives of the solitary must be. The man and the woman alike—the one in a wider, the other in a more limited sphere—drew to them on all sides the visionary minds, the sensitive hearts, the lives too tender for that harsh wear and tear of life, which in that violent age was hard, beyond our conception. They kept alive, and handed down through the conflicts of the world, a sense of spiritual religion which could not have otherwise survived in such a time. Between the Church which sold, and the world which bought, salvation, setting a great sin against a crusade or a new-built church, or a liberal alms—stood those pure souls, who had bought the right to serve God in hunger, and cold, and nakedness, by the surrender of everything.

The lesson, perhaps, is not less wanted now than it was then; but it is strange that we should feel ourselves at liberty to pity them because, in the exercise of this all-important office, they missed the vulgar joys of ordinary existence. There were enough people in the world to leave descendants like themselves, handing down the often coarse and banal line of human succession along with the houses and lands, the griefs and tumults, of humanity from one generation to another. But from Francis and from Clara, and from the line of friars and nuns who were their representatives, came the purer succession of the inner life.

We cannot follow in detail the life of Francis during this and the following year. He is said to have gone to the further parts of Italy, to have made a pilgrimage to Subiaco, to the home of St. Benedict, where he plucked the roses said to have been produced by the blood of that saint (a miracle which had been reported in the case of Francis himself in his earlier years), and worked an almost corresponding change in a thicket of brambles into which he threw himself, and which suddenly became thornless at his touch. The Bollandist, who examines every incident in the life of Francis with elaborate and unsparing criticism, declares of those miraculous brambles, that he had touched and inspected some which were transplanted into other parts of Italy, and found them perfectly smooth and harmless. Francis also visited the shrine of St. Michael the Archangel, in Monte Gargano; and on his way coming and going preached and healed, and lived, as always, in a tender communion with nature, and with those gentle brothers and sisters of the woods and fields whose society was always pleasant to him. There must have surely been a moment of repose here in the fulness of his

life, for never before does he seem to have had time for pilgrimages or for any, even spiritual, indulgence to himself. He wandered among those mountain convents, no doubt preaching by times, but apparently rather seeking the benefit of his own soul than engaged in any active mission on behalf of the souls of others. The year 1223 had arrived before he actually began the work of preparing his Rule for final submission to the Pope. Besides the necessities of the missionaries, it is possible that the death of Pietro de Catanio, and the re-appointment of Elias to the office of Vicar, stimulated him to action. After the experience of the past, Francis must have felt that, notwithstanding the high qualifications of Elias, it was scarcely safe to trust him without taking full precaution against any further innovations upon the Rule. There seems even grounds for believing that some kind of struggle took place between them at this important crisis. The legend, which seems to be inspired by a curious reminiscence of the history of Moses on a similar though much more momentous occasion, informs us that Francis went up into a mountain apart, to ponder the ancient Rule which he had drawn up in the beginning of the Order, and to reduce it to shorter size and more practical efficacy. When he had completed this work, he descended from his hill, and, giving the MS. to his vicar, went about his ordinary occupations. After a few days, however, the vicar announced that he had lost it; upon which the patient Francis, without any reproof of his carelessness, returned once more to the mountain, where, fasting upon bread and water, he once more prepared and abridged the Rule. Seeing that he could not succeed by stealth, Elias now took open means to nullify the wishes of his master. We

are told that he collected a number of the Provincial ministers, and represented to them that now was the moment to make a stand against the severity of this final Rule by which they were to be bound. He chose for this purpose men whom he knew to be on his own side, and encouraged them to rebellion. When they had strengthened each other's courage by mutual representations of the necessity, Elias, at length, wound them up to the point of following Francis to the mountain, to remonstrate with him. Bold as he was, he had not courage enough to take this office upon him, as his brethren desired, by himself; and it is evident that the courage of all must have ebbed as they approached the solitude in which Francis mused and prayed. When they came to where he was, under some leafy hut—his wonted shelter—he called to Elias in his surprise. "What would these brethren?" he asked of the vicar, who was responsible for them. Elias, moved by pride and fear, made answer, with a sudden outburst, "These are ministers of the Order, who, hearing that you are making a new Rule, and fearing that you would make it too hard for them, have come to say and protest that they cannot consent to be bound by it: make it for yourself, and not for them."

The answer of Francis to this extraordinary and sudden rebellion was of the strangest kind. Instead of replying to the speaker, or showing any surprise at his address, "The blessed father," we are told, "raised his face to heaven, and said, 'Lord, did not I say to Thee, that they would not believe me?' Then all who were present heard the voice of Christ answer in the air, 'Francis, in thy Rule there is nothing of thine, but all is mine that is therein; and I will that it should be observed literally, literally, literally,

without gloss, without gloss, without gloss.' But Christ added, 'I know what human weakness is capable of, and how much it is able to bear. Let him who will not observe the Rule leave the Order.' Then the blessed Francis, turning to the brethren, said, 'Do you hear?—do you hear? Would you have this repeated to you again?' Then the ministers, confessing their sins, retired, confused and afraid."

Such is the legend as found in the later biographers, though it is given neither by Celano nor the Three Companions. Bonaventura informs us curtly of the fact that the Rule was written in retirement upon a mountain, where Francis went accompanied by certain of the brethren, to whom he seems to have dictated it; and that the first copy being lost through the carelessness of the vicar, a second was rewritten in the same way, "as he had received the words from the mouth of God." The amplifications of the later stories, though evidently combined of fact and fiction, and much biassed by a recollection of the Scripture narrative in respect to Moses and the Tables of the Law, do still, most probably, convey some popular reflection of the truth as concerns the discussions which had already begun to rise in the Order. Elias and his brethren perhaps never did actually pursue their leader into the wild solitude of the hills, and announce to him with tremulous temerity their determination not to be bound by the rigorous law which he found practicable: but the story must have embodied some popular sense of the inquietudes that began to prevail, and of the low mutter of half-concealed grumbling and reluctance which was already audible in the midst of such a vast congregation. At least, it was a shadow of coming events, as is made but too evident by the after-progress of affairs.

The next thing to be done was to secure final authorization for this finally perfected document. And accordingly, in the winter of the year 1223, Francis is once more at Rome about this important business. He went, as was his wont, to Cardinal Ugolino, to whose suggestion, some writers tell us, this step was owing. Ugolino, no doubt, had heard his friend preach on many occasions; he knew his power to touch the hearts of his hearers, and carry away all opposition by the charm of his personal influence. That influence had moved all kinds of people, from the consequential Umbrian nobles, not naturally disposed to yield much reverence to the son of Pietro Bernardone, the shopkeeper of Assisi, to the Sultan in his Eastern camp; and no means could be more likely to propitiate Pope Honorius, the successor of Innocent III., than to produce the great orator before him, and let his eloquence and simplicity work their due effect upon the mind of the Pope. Accordingly, the Cardinal, like the friendly patron and well-instructed man of the world he was, set about the matter with infinite pains and trouble. He procured the licence to preach with sufficient ease, but the training of the preacher was of still more importance. He succeeded in persuading Francis to compose, and commit carefully to memory, an elaborate sermon. One can understand the intense excitement and anxiety, always tinctured with a sense of genial superiority, which were in Ugolino's mind when he found his plans successful, and took his place among the rest of the cardinals to hear the wandering apostle. Francis himself rose with unwonted uneasiness. Probably the imposing character of the audience would not have moved him, had he been left to himself; but this is by no means certain: for we are told that throughout his

career it happened to him, from time to time, so far to fail in powers of mind or sympathy with his hearers, that after a few minutes' hesitation, finding himself unable to proceed, he would give them his blessing and send the disappointed crowd away. At this all-important moment the same difficulty seized him. He hesitated; he trembled; he moved uneasily about his platform or pulpit, almost as if he were dancing, says the chronicler, in the height of his nervous excitement. Cardinal Ugolino, sitting by, looked on with who can tell what sympathetic thrills of shame and terror. But this preface of alarm lasted but a few moments. Francis dismissed from his mind his fine sermon which he had learned by heart, and, after the momentary pause, resumed with a rush and flow of natural eloquence. He spoke by the Holy Ghost, say the admiring historians, themselves still trembling over the closeness of the escape. "His simplicity moved no one to laughter," they tell us earnestly, "but extorted sighs of penitence even from that unaccustomed audience." Honorius, it is said, had been prejudiced against him; but no prejudice could stand before his genuine eloquence, and the noble and candid simplicity of nature which shone through him. Accordingly on the 29th of November the Order was sanctioned in full form, by a bull; and letters were sent out to all the provinces of Christendom, recommending the monasteries of the Brothers Minor to the good graces of the cardinals and bishops in distant parts.

Having thus fulfilled the object of his mission, Francis made another request to the Pope, of a very different character. He asked, with his usual simplicity, to be allowed to celebrate Christmas with certain unusual ceremonies which had suggested themselves to him—ceremonies which he must have thought likely to

seize upon the popular imagination and impress the unlearned folk. He would not do it on his own authority, we are told, lest he should be accused of levity. When he made this petition, he was bound for the village of Grecia, a little place not far from Assisi, where he was to remain during that sacred season. In this village, when the eve of the Nativity approached, Francis instructed a certain grave and worthy man, called Giovanni, to prepare an ox and an ass, along with a manger and all the common fittings of a stable, for his use, in the church. When the solemn night arrived, Francis and his brethren arranged all these things into a visible representation of the occurrences of the night at Bethlehem. The manger was filled with hay, the animals were led into their places; the scene was prepared as we see it now through all the churches of Southern Italy—a reproduction, so far as the people know how, in startling realistic detail, of the surroundings of the first Christmas. And it may be interesting to the modern traveller to know, when he looks on at the quaint Christmas celebrations of the Ara Cœli at Rome, or is led with fond pride by some poor Italian through a succession of narrow lanes to see the Præsepio (or cradle) in the parish church or convent chapel, that the scene on which he looks is an appeal to the popular imagination first originated by Francis in the church of his Umbrian village six hundred years ago.

The original occurrence is full of that honest and literal simplicity which pervades every scene in which we find the humble apostle. The population of the neighbourhood rose as one man to the characteristic call. They gathered round the village church with tapers and torches, making luminous the December night. The brethren within the church, and the crowds of the

faithful who came and went with their lights, in and out of the darkness, poured out their hearts in praises to God; and the friars sang new canticles, which were listened to with all the eagerness of a people accustomed to wandering jongleurs and minstrels, and to whom such songs were all the food to be had for the intellect and imagination. No doubt the mystic songs of Francis were among those sacred ballads, and that in the crowd there were many who could take up the chorus of the glowing hymn, "In fuoco amor mi mise" (Love sets my heart on fire), or could answer in those oft-repeated refrains, "Amor, amor, Jesu," in the words which the Brothers Minor were used to sing about the rural ways. In the midst of this glowing and agitated scene, Francis himself stood rapt by the side of the manger in which his faith could picture to itself the first cradle of his Lord. While a solemn Mass was celebrated over it in the depth of the chill winter night, thus transformed out of all its natural repose and stillness, the great spiritual leader stood by as a simple Levite, in his modest deacon's office, and chanted the Gospel. This was his part in the services which he originated and carried out by the wonderful fervour of his individual devotion. Not his the holy mysteries, the raising of the host, the awful consecration which turned common bread into the Bread of life. While these high rites were going on, no humbler, simpler, devouter worshipper knelt in God's presence. But when his moment of privilege came, his was the office that suited him best. He sang the Gospel with that voice which all his life had poured itself forth, in cheerful, pathetic sweetness, sonorous and simple, over all the discords and false tones of common life. Nothing could be more symbolical, more significant. No array of interceding saints, no

secondary mediators, stood between this fervent Catholic and the throne of God. He had his Gospel and his Master, and needed nothing more.

We are told that Francis stood by this, his simple theatrical (for such, indeed, it was—no shame to him) representation, all the night long, sighing for joy, and filled with an unspeakable sweetness. His friend Giovanni, looking on, had a vision while he stood apart gazing and wondering at the saint. Giovanni saw or dreamed that a beautiful infant—a child dead or in a trance—lay in the manger which he had himself prepared; and that as Francis bent over the humble bed, the babe slowly awoke, and stretched out its arms towards him. It was the child Christ, the subject of traditions so varied and perennial, but this time in a new form—the Christ dead in the hearts of a careless people, dead or lost in the slumber of a wicked world, but waking up to new life, and kindling the whole slumberous universe around him, at the touch and breath of that supreme love which was in his servant's heart. The reader will take Giovanni's vision with faith or incredulity, as may suit his temper; but not the sharpest critic, not our Bollandist shaking his head over every new detail, can cloud for us that figure of the humble Francis standing by the rude manger, which he had made in his simplicity, and "sighing for joy."

In the next year after this Christmas scene, the event of the time was the sending forth of the new mission to Germany, to fulfil the purpose in which our simple brethren, who knew no language but their own, had failed. They carried with them all manner of recommendations—letters to princes and ecclesiastical dignitaries, and the copy of Pope Honorius's bull, which gave them a recognized character in the

Church. And what was, perhaps, as much to the purpose, the missionaries were headed by a certain Cæsar of Spires, who most likely was himself a German, and would know how to speak to his countrymen. Great was the contrast to the equipment of the former mission; and the difference in its result was equally great. They were well received everywhere, armed as they were at once with recommendations and with an interpreter. And perhaps even the slow Germans had found out by this time that the brown-frocked brethren, whom they had driven out of their land as heretics, were, in reality, very champions and pillars of the faith. The Chapter at which the new missionaries were sent forth was probably the last which Francis ever attended; for it was one of the conditions of the new Rule, that the Chapter once held at every Pentecost should henceforward meet but once in three years. The Order was now too widely spread to make the early arrangement possible, and its organization had taken a more advanced form. Francis, though there is no evidence to prove that he had ceased to consider himself as the final authority in everything fundamental to the Order, yet would seem to have given up more and more the actual authority into Elias's hands. He was ill and suffering, with bad eyes and a worn-out frame; and his overflowing energy, perhaps, was somewhat quieted within him. Here, however, is one quaint instance of his absolute sense of authority when it came to any important question, at which the reader will be tempted to smile.

Pietro de Catanio died, as we have said, in 1223. He was buried in the church of the Portiuncula, the beloved home of the brethren; and after his death a series of miracles were done at his grave, of which it

might be supposed the community would have been proud. But, though the honour was great, the nuisance was still greater. The Assisans came trooping down, some with their sick, most out of curiosity, to the marvellous grave, thronging the church, and filling the tranquil air with the hum of a perpetual crowd. When this disturbance came to such a pitch that it could be borne no longer, the brethren in a body explained their grievance to their founder; upon which he took immediate action in the quaintest way. No intermediate measures, as applied to the populace, occurred to Francis. He would not close the doors upon them, or point out their error. He went at once to the grave in which reposed his faithful disciple. "Brother Pietro," he said, standing by the stone, "you gave me, all your life, a perfect obedience. Know now that the brethren are disturbed and prayer is hindered by the crowds that come to your tomb. I command you, by holy obedience, to work no more miracles, that the brethren may live in peace." Pietro heard in those still regions whither he had gone; the obedient soul restrained its posthumous zeal for the good of men; the miracles ceased, and with them the crowd. Thus Francis, humblest of humble men and tenderest of friends, carried his idea of his own absolute authority, and of the necessity of obedience, into that silence which lies beyond the grave.

CHAPTER XV.

POETRY.

We have just spoken of the songs which Francis had taught to his disciples, and in which he had expressed and relieved his own heart. It was in or about this year 1224 that the most important and characteristic of these songs, which has come down to us untouched in all its simplicity, the *Cantico del Sole* (Song of the Sun), or as it is sometimes called the *Cantico delle Creature* (Song of the Creatures), was composed. It is impossible to suppose that during all these years Francis, who was the leader of the young Troubadours of Assisi in his early days, and who went through the woods and fields, after his conversion, singing to himself, still in French, songs which could not surely be the same songs he had sung through the streets among his joyous companions—the lays of war and of love,—it is impossible, we say, to suppose that it was for the first time at this late date that he had woven together canticles to the glory of God; but we are assured that these quaint and unskilled rhymes were the first beginning of vernacular poetry in Italy. Soft and sweet and sonorous as we have learned to think the Italian tongue, it was in those days but struggling humbly into notice as a possible medium for verse. Latin had not yet ceased to be the proper and natural utterance for

everything beyond the commonest affairs of life, except in the case of those songs of love and chivalry which the Provençals had stolen out of the stately keeping of the old language. Italian was but the vulgar tongue in the days of Francis. His French songs came naturally to his lips, notwithstanding his imperfect knowledge of the language, because it was the natural language, the mother tongue, of song. The only alternative was the Latin psalms and canticles which the Church provided for her Troubadour, and which he sang as he passed, cheerful and courageous, by so many precipitous paths and dangerous ways. But these psalms did not give all the outlet necessary to his overflowing heart; and as life grew harder and more serious, and the exuberant energies of youth began to wane, no doubt the apostle must have grown a little weary, perhaps unconsciously, of the quips and cranks of an exotic language, and longed for a more sober and simple utterance than that which had satisfied his youth. It was after one of his long fasts, when his spirit, entranced by contemplation of divine things, had risen into an ecstatic sense of the greatness of God and the beauty of His world, subjects which always touched and excited his mind, that nature and passion had their way, and spoke through him in the language which came readiest to hand.

"He had spent," says Ozanam, "forty nights in his vigils, and had an ecstasy, at the conclusion of which he desired Brother Leonard (Leo?) to take a pen and to write, upon which he chanted the canticle of the Sun. After he had thus improvised, he charged Brother Pacifico, who in the world had been a poet, to reduce the words into a rhythm more exact, and commanded that the brethen should learn them by heart in order to recite them every

day." The hymn thus produced, the reader will perceive, is not, notwithstanding the aid of Brother Pacifico, at all remarkable for exactitude of rhythm. There is a curious irregular cadence about it, a rhyme coming here and there in a wildly accidental way, which is not without a certain sweetness. We are reminded, while we read, of the modern lyrics of another Italian, parted from Francis not further by the distance of time than by the immense difference of meaning and character—the unhappy and greatly gifted Giacomo Leopardi. The melancholy singer of the nineteenth century weaves his wild, melodious rhymes with an apparent disregard of rule, in which there is more art than meets the eye. But the irregularity of Francis's verse was real. It was the faltering tones of the first essay, the hesitating, broken speech of a beginner, who is doubtful how far his words will serve him, or whether the language is equal to the call he is making upon it. It was the language of Dante, the language of song, of which its first singer was so uncertain; and there could be no more striking evidence of the feebleness of human perception even among the best endowed. We have attempted to give the "Song of the Creatures" in as nearly as possible an exact reproduction of its broken rhymes and faltering measures.

"Highest omnipotent good Lord,
Glory and honour to Thy name adored,
And praise and every blessing.
Of everything Thou art the source,
No man is worthy to pronounce Thy name.

"Praised by His creatures all,
Praised be the Lord my God,
By Messer Sun, my brother above all,
Who by his rays lights us and lights the day—
Radiant is she, with his great splendour stored,
Thy glory, Lord, confessing.

"By Sister Moon and stars my Lord is praised,
Where clear and fair they in the heavens are raised.

"By Brother Wind, my Lord, Thy praise is said,
By air and clouds and the blue sky o'erhead,
By which Thy creatures all are kept and fed.

"By one most humble, useful, precious, chaste,
By Sister Water, O my Lord, Thou art praised.

"And praisëd is my Lord
By Brother Fire—he who lights up the night
Jocund, robust is he, and strong and bright.

"Praised art thou, my Lord, by Mother Earth—
Thou who sustainest her, and governest,
And to her flowers, fruit, herbs, dost colour give and birth."

Thus stood the original hymn; and we are not told how long it had been learned by the Brethren and sung in the convent every day, no doubt exciting a certain simple, surprised delight in the heart of Francis, when he thus heard with his own ears how successfully he had managed the rude vulgar language which nobody up to this time had thought worthy of poetry. He had redeemed his mother tongue as he redeemed the poor little trembling lambs, and there might well be permitted to him a thrill of satisfaction and generous pleasure in the thought. But some time thereafter there came an angry gust of trouble from without into the quiet convent. The rumour blew down the hill-side to the Portiuncula, disturbing the tranquillity therein. It was a quarrel doubly serious—a struggle between the ecclesiastical authorities and the temporal—between the Bishop of Assisi and the magistrates. "The bishop"—we quote once more from Ozanam's interesting work on the Franciscan poets—"had put the town under an interdict, and the magistrates in their turn had outlawed the bishop, and forbidden all intercourse with him and his." Nothing could be more likely to move the

mind of Francis than such a quarrel. He was deeply affected by it; and finding that nobody stepped in to interfere, he himself took up his newly-found weapon. He added another verse to the canticle, and sent his brethren—being, as is most likely, too weak and ailing to go himself—to Assisi, minstrels of peace, to sing as he himself had so often sung amid the gay companions of his youth.

The new verse is as follows:—

> "And praisëd is my Lord
> By those who, for Thy love, can pardon give,
> And bear the weakness and the wrongs of men.
> Blessed are those who suffer thus in peace,
> By Thee, the Highest, to be crowned in heaven."

There is a touching simple confidence in the power of his composition, such as belongs only to the very humblest and the very greatest of poets, in the fact that "he commanded his disciples to go boldly and seek the great people of the town, and beg them to meet at the bishop's palace." The name of Francis was so potent that the surprised and reluctant burghers obeyed, not knowing what communication might be about to be made to them. No doubt they were already acquainted with the strains of the song which Francis had poured out of the fulness of his heart; and it is easy to imagine what a strange scene it must have been when the indignant belligerents found themselves face to face in the bishop's hall or courtyard. But when the song, with its new verse, fell on their ears, their hearts smote them. "At the sound of these words, to which God seemed to have lent a gentle strength, the adversaries repented and embraced, and asked each other's pardon." Such was the first result of Francis's "vulgar" verses and the tender and anxious outpouring of his heart. The

Bishop of Assisi had acted a most wise and friendly part towards him in the first struggles of his separation from the world; and no doubt among the rebellious magistrates were some of the companions whom he had led in their sports, and loved with the effusive sympathy of youth. Thus he who was the first to turn to poetry that sweet Italian tongue which has become the typical language of song, used it first for the service of his home, the town which to a mediæval Italian absorbed all that warmth of patriotic feelings which other nations give to their country. Assisi was the Italy of Francis, and it was thus politically as well as spiritually that her loyal son did her service. Perhaps Pacifico was one of the singers, chosen for his gifts no less than for his name—he who had been king of minstrels, crowned at the Emperor's splendid court with the crown of bays, which afterwards fell to the lot of Petrarch and Tasso, but now a Brother Minor, humbly subject to the commands of his superior, and perhaps with a secret wonder at the effect, intoning those sonorous syllables which had a certain melody in themselves independent of quantity or rhyme. The skilled poet must have marvelled at it, as conventional learning and wit always marvel at the intuitions of simple genius. But not less was the gentle Pacifico obedient, putting his science, as he had put everything else, at the absolute command of his master. In this way did an Italian crowd first listen to Italian poetry, perceiving with surprised delight the sweetness in it, and receiving into their moved hearts the friendly arrow of individual admonition at the end—"The Lord is praised by those who can forgive, who can suffer wrong, and keep His peace. Such shall be crowned in heaven." Bishop and burgher must have felt the flush of shame come over them as this soft reproach stole on

their ears. No man there had heard hard words from the courteous Francis. Some perhaps might remember, when they looked back in their memories, how they had gibed at him in his early struggles, but never roused his gentle soul to unkind response. Thus they were taken by storm, and Francis's victory was complete.

Another verse was added to this song, a little later, which is full of still more beautiful meaning. He was weak and suffering, worn out by his great labours, and suffering from many bodily afflictions, his eyes so worn that he could scarcely see, his strength reduced by perpetual attacks of fever—when, after a temporary rally, he had a vision, from which he learned that in two years his sufferings should be over, and he should enter into eternal rest. Then once more, in the joy of his heart, he sent for Brother Leo, and added to the song which the brethren sang to him daily, and which it is evident he loved as if it were a favourite child, the following and final verse :—

> " Praised by our Sister Death, my Lord, art Thou,
> From whom no living man escapes.
> Who die in mortal sin have mortal woe ;
> But blessed they who die doing Thy will,—
> The second death can strike at them no blow.
>
> " Praises, and thanks, and blessing to my Master be :
> Serve ye Him all, with great humility."

Thus concludes the Song of the Creatures, the chief utterance of the heart of Francis. The simple importance he gives to it, the tender pleasure with which he dwells upon its lines, will go to the reader's heart. We add, below, the original,[1] to which, we are

[1] " Altissimo, omnipotente, bon Signore,
Tue son le laude, la gloria, et l'onore,
Et ogni benedictione,
A te solo se confano,
Et nullo homo è degno di nominarte.

aware, our rude version does no justice; but we have thought it best to show as nearly as possible in English the broken rhymes and irregular structure which mark its primitive character—the beginning of a national poetry, which sixty years later had developed into the splendour of Dante, reaching its climax, not as other languages do, by the slow progress of centuries, but all at once by a bound.

"Laudato sia Dio mio Signore
Cum tutte le tue creature,
Specialmente messer lo frate sole,
Il quale giorna et illumina nui per lui,
Et ello è bello et radiante cum grande splendore,
De te Signore porta significatione.

"Laudato sia mio Signore per suor luna et per le stelle,
In cielo le hai formate clare è belle.

"Laudato sia mio Signore per frate vento,
Et per l'aire et nuvolo, et sereno et ogni tempo;
Per le quale dai a le tue creature sostentamento.

"Laudato sia mio Signore per suor aqua,
La quale è molto utile et humile et pretiosa et casta.

"Laudato sia mio Signore per frate foco,
Per lo quale tu alumini la nocte
Et ello è bello et jocundo e robustissimo et forte.

"Laudato sia mio Signore per nostra madre terra
La quale ne sostenta et guberna,
Et produce diversi fructi et coloriti fiori et herba.

"Laudato sia mio Signore
Per quelle che perdonano per lo tuo amore
Et sosteneno infirmitade et tribulatione,
Beate quelli che sostenerano in pace,
Che da ti, Altissimo serano incoronati.

"Laudate sia mio Signore per suor nostra morte corporale:
Da la quale nullo homo vivente puo scampare.
Guai a quelli che more in peccato mortale!
Beati quelli che se trovano nele tue sanctissime voluntate
Che la morte secunda non li porà far male.

"Laudate et benedicite mio Signore et regratiate
Et servite a lui cum grande humilitade."

"The poem of St. Francis," says Ozanam, "is very short, and yet all his soul is to be found there—his fraternal friendship for the creatures, the charity which impels a man so humble and gentle to interfere in public quarrels, and that infinite love which, after having sought God in nature, and served Him in the person of suffering humanity, desires nothing more than to find Him in death. It comes to us like a breath from that earthly paradise of Umbria, where the sky is so bright, and the earth so full of flowers. The language has all the simplicity of a new-born idiom; the rhythm shows all the inexperience of a poetry untrained, which satisfies indulgent ears at small expense. Sometimes rhyme is replaced by simple *assonance;* sometimes it occurs only at the beginning and end of a stanza. The fastidious writer will find some difficulty in recognizing in it the rules and conditions of a lyrical composition. It is nothing but a cry; but it is the cry of a new-born poetry, destined to grow and make itself heard through the whole earth."

The other poems attributed to St. Francis are of doubtful authenticity. Probably broken snatches of song, really proceeding from his lips, may have been caught up and put into fuller shape by those disciples who inherited, along with the same fervour of devotion, their master's love for poetry. One of these, however, is so full of the spirit of adoration, and represents a soul so rapt in the love of God, that it seems to us to vouch for itself. Probably the extraordinary conflict between the soul and Christ, which it portrays, had reference to the solemn and extraordinary scene which took place in the mysterious solitude of Monte Alverno in the autumn of the year 1224, and which we are about to relate. We can do no more

than extract here a few verses from the beginning and end of this lyric, which the reader will perceive is meant to be sung with a chorus, like all primitive songs. It begins as follows: We again attempt to render, as best we can, the exact rhythm of the original:—

"Love sets my heart on fire;
Love sets my heart on fire.

"Love sets my heart on fire,
Love of my Bridegroom new;
Love's lamb my thoughts inspire,
As on the ring he drew.
Then in a prison dire,
Sore wounded, he me threw:
My heart breaks with desire,
Love sets my heart on fire

"My heart is cleft in twain;
On earth my body lies,
The arrow of this pain
From Love's own crossbow flies,
Piercing my heart in twain.
Of sweetness my soul dies,
For peace comes war again.
Love sets my heart on fire.

"I die of sweetest woe;
Wonder not at my fate:
The lance which gives the blow
Is love immaculate.
A hundred arm's-length, know,
So long and wide the blade,
Has pierced me at a blow.
Love sets my heart on fire."

Then follows a long account of the mysterious duel. The lance of Christ presses him so sharply that he despairs of defending himself. The strokes are as stones charged with lead. The soul is stricken down broken and prostrate on the earth, dying, not of death, but of joy. Then it feels itself restored, strengthened

and encouraged, and, by a bold metaphor, breaks forth upon the side where Christ stands, assails Him in return, and is avenged of Him in this wonderful conflict of love.

" When thus with Christ I fought,
Peace made we after ire ;
For first from Him was brought
Dear love's veracious fire ;
And love of Christ has wrought
Such strength, I cannot tire :
He dwells in soul and thought.
Love sets my heart on fire.'

We cannot but think there is also something of Francis in the passionate strophes of the following poem—probably, as we have already said, something caught up by minds less simple, who developed his enthusiasm into exaggeration :—

" O love, O love, which thus hast wounded me,
No other name than love can I proclaim ;
O love, O love, let me be joined to thee !
Love only sets my heart aflame.
O love, O love, thou so possessest me,
My heart flows forth at Thy dear name :
My strength would be all pain above,
Love, but to be with Thee.
O love, for courtesy,
Make me to die of love ! "

These latter hymns carry the reader into an aspect of the character of Francis different from that which we have most fully insisted on. It is not that love which inspired his whole genial, energetic human life to good works and the service of his fellow-creatures—that which made him so open to every sympathy, the friend of all created things ; but rather the mystic supernatural rapture in which his life, or at least his history, culminates. It is that love of God which, like

a divine fire, consumes the melting, rending, dying, yet enraptured soul; which swallows up every other sentiment, and absorbs the worshipper in the very being of the Divinity whom he adores. Flesh and blood cannot long support that ecstasy of revelation. The body becomes as nothing in the flood of sacred light, in the glow and heat of a love which is beyond any mortal passion. Sometimes the outer man is raised towards the heaven in which is his heart, and appears to his enthusiastic followers floating, now higher, now lower, lifted in bodily rapture from the earth. Sometimes it is the mind alone which is lost in God; and then the external senses may fail altogether, and the mortal garment lie like a thing dead, while the soul mounts into the skies. The principle of this mystic love is not so much that of actual service to God and His creatures, but of an absolute devotion which sweeps away the creature altogether, and makes everything subservient to spiritual communion. No doubt the distinction between the active servant of God, who gives up all things to serve Him, and the mystic who gives up even the privilege of serving Him in the deeper joy of beholding, is to a very great extent a difference of temperament; but in Francis occurs the unusual spectacle of the two combined. A mystic he can scarcely be called; for no man has ever trod this mortal soil who has laboured more constantly, or kept his eyes more open to the wants of common humanity; and yet few mystics can show so strange a chapter of absolute communion with the Almighty. In the awful solitude at Monte Alverno, where he went to be alone with his God, what was it that came to him in the silence, wounding him as with the lance, a hundred braccia long, of inconceivable love? He was rapt out of all sense

of the cares that hung so heavily upon him—all the responsibilities of the Order—even, what is still more wonderful, out of all his tender yearning for the world about him, and desire of exchanging brotherly sympathy even with the beasts and the birds. What he saw, what he dreamed, what he thought and longed for, was God himself, and no other; the beginning and end of his own being, the sum and essence of all things. Thus, the life which had been spent for the good of man, he poured out into the bosom of God, and carried his existence, the career which is so real, so laborious, so over-brimming with energy and strength, by a mystic episode of wonders, into that region which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. He had the best of both characters—the activity of Martha, the devotion of Mary. Such is the light which these poems help to throw upon his later life; a life equally stainless in both its developments—in its dedication to the service of God through man, and in utter trance of absorption in God Himself.

We feel that we ought to pass at once from these divine songs to the mystic and wonderful chapter of the life of Francis which is the last, except the end of all, which remains to be told; but, in the meantime, something must be said of the other fragments of his productions which have been handed down to us. These are, several letters, addressed, with one or two exceptions, to the ministers and brethren of his Order, and a few scattered paragraphs of holy counsel and prayers. We quote, from a letter addressed "To all the Faithful," the following remarkable description of Death, which is not only full of descriptive force, but curiously indicative of the mediæval circumstances

surrounding that commonest and most universal of all events:—

"The body sickens, death draws nigh; friends and neighbours come, saying, 'Set thy house in order, for thou must die.' And lo! wife and children, neighbours and friends, begin to weep; and, looking, he sees them weeping, and he says, 'Lo! soul and body, and all that I have, I place in your hands.' Truly that man is cursed who trusts and risks in such hands soul and body, and all that he has; for the Lord hath said by the prophets, 'Cursed is he who putteth his trust in man.' And immediately his family send for a priest, who says to him, 'Dost thou repent of all thy sins?' He answers, 'I do.' 'Wilt thou make satisfaction for thy sins, and restore that which thou hast gotten by deceit and wrong?' He answers, 'No.' And when the priest says, 'Wherefore not?' he answers, 'Because I have placed all my goods in the hands of my family.' And then he becomes speechless, and thus dies most miserable. But let all men know that wheresoever and howsoever a man dies thus in mortal sin, without having made satisfaction, where he has been able to do so, let them know that such an one is taken by the devil, who snatches soul from body with such anguish and torment as none can know save he who suffers it. And all his talents, power, and knowledge which he thought he had, are taken from him; and his friends and neighbours on whom he has bestowed his goods take possession of them and divide them, and afterwards say, 'Cursed be his soul; for he might have given us more and might have gained more than he has.' Worms feed on his body—devils gnaw his soul; and thus he loses soul and body for the sake of this fleeting world."

In the same letter is a brief but full ascription of praise, which embodies almost all which Francis afterwards sang in the *Cantico delle Creature,* although written eleven years earlier:—

"Now to that God who has suffered so much for us, who at one giving (literally *colpo*, stroke) has conferred on us so many good things, and will yet confer so many more—to this God let every creature who is

in heaven or upon the earth, in the sea or in the depth of the abyss, render praise, glory, honour, and blessing. He is himself our virtue and our strength; He alone is good, lofty almighty, admirable, and glorious, the only holy, worthy of praise, and blessed through ages of ages. Amen."

We might add a much longer act of thanksgiving in which the saint calls upon heaven and earth, and all that is therein, in eloquent enumeration, to praise with him his God and his Saviour; but our space forbids the repetition. We may, however, pause to point out that, though his biographers tell us now and then of his devotion to one saint or another, Francis himself makes no allusion to anything of the kind. God and His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, are the two great figures he sees, giving light to the whole world. In the glory of the firmament about them his dazzled eyes distinguish no other presence. He has not time to go and lavish his heart upon lesser altars. His brief prayers, his long meditations, the tears that made him blind, are all addressed to the Father and the Son.

We will only quote further the following *Quotidiana beati patris oratio* (the daily prayer of the blessed father), the words in which Francis commended himself daily to God:—

"My God and my all, who art Thou, sweetest Lord, my God? and who am I, a poor worm, Thy servant? Holiest Lord, I would love Thee! Sweetest Lord, I would love Thee! Lord, my God, I give to Thee all my heart and body, and vehemently desire, if I might know how, to do more for Thy love."

What more could a whole liturgy say? Thus Francis prayed in the innocence of his humble soul, eager for any enlightenment, for any way of serving

God, "if he might but know how." "My brethren, let us now begin to serve God," he would say in these waning years of his life. "Up to this time we have done nothing." He was an unprofitable servant: he had done what it was his duty to do. And fervently, with a longing beyond words, he desired to do more—to find some new way of demonstrating his devotion.

CHAPTER XVI.

MONTE ALVERNO.

Up to this moment the life of Francis had been attended by many incidents out of which faith and imagination might well conjure up the appearance of miracle, and was indeed full of that atmosphere of fervent feeling, utter self-renunciation and unlimited belief, which is of itself a miraculous condition from which any wonder may come. Nothing, however, had been asserted concerning him, which, when traced to its foundation, might not be received by any critic as at least possible. But the moment is now approaching when the concluding wonder of his life, his grand distinction among all the saints of the calendar,—the event which, according to popular belief, raised him to a point of mystic union with his Lord not yet attained by any mortal,—was to be accomplished with all the solemn accompaniments which became so great a marvel. We reserve our own comments upon the Stigmata, until the reader has before him all the facts of the wonderful history, and the nature of the testimony upon which it rests; and in the meantime proceed simply with the story as it was given to the world in his own century, and fervently and devoutly believed by almost all Christendom; premising only that the amplifications given to the narrative by more recent writers do not alter the character of the event

itself, but that this event is as fully asserted in the contemporary biography of Celano as by any subsequent annalist. Most miracles grow visibly, as the stream of history flows on, and come to a very simple germ indeed if we trace them back to the fountain-head. But the honours of the Stigmata are as fully claimed for Francis in the memoir written three years after his death, as in the half-idolatrous romances of his Order made centuries later. The great central fact remains unenlarged, unchanged. The only difference is, that whereas his spiritual descendants exalt this distinction into the highest and most momentous event of his life, his contemporaries assign to it a much less important place, regarding it as less momentous and less characteristic than the long years of toil and patience, the holy life and wonderful works which he accomplished in the world. This distinction is curiously characteristic and significant, and reminds us of the manner in which St. Paul treats those gifts of tongues and miracles which in later days have been raised to an exaggerated importance. The wonder *was;* but, like all wonders, it was detached from the common course of life, and not in reality so important to it as one day of strenuous work, one hour of victory over temptation. It is thus that Celano and the Three Companions deal with the mystery of the Stigmata. They were too near the noble simple figure of their master to be able to imagine that the mysterious marks on his hands and feet could ever seem more important than his goodness, his tenderness, his love for God and man, the purity and zeal and labours of his life. Himself they set before us, not, it is true, at any great length, but yet with affectionate fulness in chapter after chapter, while the story of the Stigmata is simply

told in one or two paragraphs. The man diminished, and the miracle grew, in the course of the ages, but yet the event itself has not been altered. This is, at the very outset, a curiously natural and powerful testimony to the wonderful tale.

To return, however, to the story. The manner in which Francis became possessed (as much as he could be possessed of anything) of the scene of this wonderful event is narrated fully in the annals of the Brothers Minor by Wadding, an authority much quoted by all subsequent writers; but we prefer to take the more picturesque narrative of the *Fioretti*, which is substantially the same as his. The date of this picturesque incident is variously stated. Wadding puts it as far back as 1212; but as there is no mention of it in all the intervening years, until the solemn moment when it becomes the chief scene of the picture, we are disposed to conclude that the legend which describes the gift as having been made in 1224 is more trustworthy. Francis, accompanied by his young brother, the simple Leo, was passing by the great castle of Monte Feltro on one of his usual apostolic journeys, when the travellers saw an immense concourse of people hastening to the castle, and heard that there were great festivities going on in celebration of the new knighthood of one of the sons of the house. "Let us go to this festa; perhaps, by the help of God, we shall gather spiritual fruit," said Francis to his companion; and when they had reached the great quadrangle within the walls, crowded with holiday folks from town and country, and all the neighbouring lords and their retainers, the poor apostle stood up on a little wall, and began to preach. Probably the contrast of all this pomp and rejoicing, and all the wealth and pleasure round him, with his

own life and aspect, had suddenly struck his imaginative and impressionable mind; or he saw in some wistful, marvelling face before him the sudden flash of that perception—the wonder how it was that men still capable of all the enjoyments of life should strip themselves of all delight, as did those brown-frocked, penniless brethren? Such a thought must have been in his mind when he gave forth the homely rhyme which he made his text—

"Tanto è il bene ch' io aspetto
Ch' ogni pena m'è diletto"

("So great is the good I look for, that every hardship delights me.") How strangely real and true must such a sentiment have been as he stood there among the glories of the mediæval feast, confronting the young knight in his bravery, and all the ruffling nobles of the country-side, with gleam of armour and waving of plumes, and cloth of gold and rich embroidery making the old walls splendid! They had so much the best of it in this life; might it be that a momentary thrill of human weakness passed through the preacher's own mind as he stood among them? He preached "so devoutly and profoundly," says the primitive chronicler, "that all the people stood with mind and eyes intent upon him, listening as if he had been an angel of God." Among the rest was a certain Orlando of Chiusi, in Casentino, a great and rich Tuscan noble, whose heart was touched, and who, approaching the preacher, asked to speak with him in private about religious things; but the courteous Francis, great as was his zeal, could not sanction such a departure from the gracious laws of good-breeding which were in his nature. "In the meantime, go and do honour to thy friends who have invited thee, and

dine with them," he said, "and after dinner we shall talk together as much as you please." When Orlando had fulfilled his social duties, he returned to Francis, and after much conversation about spiritual matters, told the preacher that he had on his lands a certain hill, "divotissimo," as he describes it—a place most secluded, wild, and still, on which any one who sought silence, and a solitary life, and the means of utter retirement from the world, might find a shelter, and which he prayed to be allowed to give to the brethren as a kind of hermitage and place of retreat. With this understanding, Francis accepted the proffered gift. It does not seem to have been a gift of any profit or lordship on the hill, which, no doubt, had its fertile slopes like the other parts of Apennine; but only of the rocky heights, the remote and solitary place to which a man might retire to commune with God, out of sound and sight of men. When he had returned to the Portiuncula, he sent two of the brethren to Orlando, to receive the strange, beautiful, visionary present. The Monte Alverno, or Monte della Vernia, is situated on the borders of Tuscany, near the sources of the Tiber and the Arno, not far from the castle of Chiusi, where Orlando lived. When they arrived at his house, he received them joyfully, and next day sent them to inspect the solitude which was to be theirs, under an escort of fifty knights and armed men—to secure their safety, says the legend, from the wild beasts which haunted the woods. Of these wild beasts, however, we hear nothing subsequently; and it would seem more likely that Orlando sent such attendants as he had—armed men, because warriors were more plentiful than ordinary servants—to guide the brethren, and help them to make a little shelter for themselves from the cold air

of the mountain, as well as from the wolves and bears which might haunt the neighbourhood. The warlike escort cut down branches with their swords, and built a leafy hut for the bare-footed brethren, when they had found a part of the hill which was *molto divota, e molto atta a contemplare* ("very devout and very apt for contemplation")—a place of silence and utter seclusion, where there was nothing to disturb the thoughts from God. The idea seems to have charmed the fancy of Francis; such a possession, so visionary, so unlike any other landed property, the wooded peaks and rocky ravines which could not produce a blade of wheat for their proprietor, but procured him a sacred retirement, the sweet solitude of nature, the ineffable stillness of a mountain top, went to his heart. It was a gift which one poet might have made to another, and which will move the heart of the sympathetic reader with a touch of friendly regard and gratitude towards Ser Orlando of Chiusi, even over all these centuries.

When the brethren who had been sent to investigate—the "pious explorers," as they are called by Wadding—returned with the news, Francis seems to have given way to genuine natural pleasure. "We will spend the Lent of St. Michael there," he said. He seems to have been in the habit of keeping this secondary Lent, and there are special exercises of piety appropriated to it—even in the Rule of the Tertiaries. The history goes on to relate how he set out, with three of the brethren, Fra Masseo, Fra Leo, and Fra Angelo of Rieti; the latter is (as was also Leo) one of the Three Companions who afterwards wrote his life, but probably a later disciple than the others, as there is less mention of him. He is described as a man of high birth

("molto gentile"), and who had been a knight. The description of the journey is charmingly idyllic, but we cannot quote it here. Burly Fra Masseo was the guardian of the little party, deciding where they were to rest at night, and what to do. In this wise they journeyed slowly along through the rich vale of Umbria to the Tuscan borders. The strength of Francis gave way before they began the ascent of the hill; and an ass was borrowed for him from a village in one of the hamlets they passed. We omit the details of the primitive narrative, which record how Francis was so assailed by demons that his brethren found him in the morning completely exhausted by his conflict with them, the whole powers of hell having apparently collected together to hinder the saint as he went to this grand and crowning glory of his life. More characteristic, however, is his pause before mounting to the highest heights of Alverno, which alone were his special property. He had thrown himself down under an oak to rest, in the languor of the September afternoon, when suddenly a multitude of birds came from every quarter, singing and beating their wings as if for joy. These gentle inhabitants of the mountain threw themselves upon their new lord with every demonstration of welcome; upon his head and shoulders and arms, in his cowl, and everywhere about him, his fluttering attendants perched, while his companions and the amazed peasant who led his ass stood by wondering. "Carissimi fratelli," (dearest brethren) said the gentle apostle, with great delight and gladness, "I think it must be pleasant to our Lord Jesus Christ that we should dwell in this solitary place, since our brothers and sisters, the birds, are so glad of our coming." Thus harmoniously, with tender delight and joy, was the sacred seclusion begun.

Another curious assembly took place on the mountain, however, before the solemnities of the Lenten retirement. Orlando, hearing of the arrival of Francis, climbed the hill with his warlike train to welcome him. The story is full, at every turn, of the most picturesque details. Francis had found, in his first survey, another spot still more "*atto e divoto alla orazione*" (devout and suitable for prayer); and, at his desire, the knights went to work once more with their swords, and made him a little cell with branches, at the foot of a fine beech, a little way apart from the *tuguriolo* or hut built for his companions. When these warlike visitors had withdrawn, silence fell upon the heights of Apennine. A glorious Italian sky above, the beech and the chestnut and here and there a mighty oak breaking the monotony of the great rocks and wild ravines, and four poor men, as dependent upon God as were the birds, held up aloft on the tops of the hills to pray for the far-off world, of which not even a sound could reach them in their solitude—how impressive is the scene! Francis withdrew himself to his cell under the beech. They were all used to endure the weather, exposure to cold and to heat, and all the dangers peculiar to the climate; and Orlando had desired them to come to his house for provisions as long as they remained on the mount. Thus they were left utterly free for their devout occupations. Before this time, Francis, as we have recorded, had received a warning from heaven that he should live only two years longer; and it is evident that his strength was much impaired, and the body of which, all his life, he had been so careless, was beginning to avenge itself. The clouds that gather round the setting sun were collecting about him, though he was still little over forty—an age which ought to be the strongest and fullest of a man's existence. We are

informed by Celano and the other early biographers that he had sought the direction of God in his devotions by the method which he had already so often adopted, of solemn reference to the Holy Scriptures, the book being first laid upon the altar and the sign of the cross solemnly made over it. Each time the volume opened at the narrative of our Lord's passion. The deduction which Francis drew from this was, that he was to pass into the kingdom of heaven, like his Master, through much tribulation: "much anguish, many struggles," adds Celano. It was to be a martyrdom—a supreme and awful conflict. This was all he could divine, and with a thankful heart he had prepared himself to meet it. But there is no evidence that he anticipated that the mountain solitude, which he had sought with so much natural cheerful satisfaction, was to be the scene of this agony. He withdrew to his cell under the beech-tree to commune with God and weep over his sins; but not, so far as is apparent, with any thought beyond those natural to the beginning of a "retreat," or special season of devotion.

It was nothing new to Francis to fix his soul upon the passion of our Lord. Years before, when he was but commencing his career, he had been found on his knees, with tears streaming from his eyes, and on being asked the cause of them had answered that he wept for the sufferings of his Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of all his activity and natural cheerfulness, this passionate sympathy had always been part of his life. To a mind so disposed to literal realization of every article of faith, it may easily be supposed how intense such sympathy would grow when he had shut himself up, as it were, to the contemplation of that chief of martyrdoms, the most wonderful act

ever accomplished on earth. The horror of that great darkness came upon Francis in his solitude as if he had been one of the melancholy spectators who beheld it afar off. But not afar off was the impassioned Italian who loved all God's creatures, but loved none so well as the Creator himself — the Saviour upon whom all his thoughts were bent. He followed in his fervent soul every detail of the Crucifixion, longing to share the agony as he shared the redemption, his heart all aflame with desire to be one with his Master. Strange visions floated about him in his abstraction, in the long silent hours of which probably he scarce knew which was night and which was day. He was rapt in God, the disciples tell us, speaking themselves with vague, mysterious voices out of the awful calm. They heard his voice in the wood by times murmuring, not any eloquence of prayer, but those habitual words which he said day by day, "Who art Thou, dearest Lord, *Iddio mio?* and who am I, a vile worm and unworthy servant?" It was on the day of the Holy Cross, the 14th September, that this ecstasy reached its highest point. The legend tells us that the saint had asked two special gifts from God: the first, that he should realize in body and soul the sufferings of Christ; and the second, that his heart might be filled, so far as that was possible, with the same excessive love which had induced our Lord to undertake such suffering for the sake of man. While he thus prayed there appeared to him, stretching over him, a great figure as of a Seraph. (We quote, in the first place, from Celano, the first biographer of Francis.) This solemn and wonderful apparition had the arms extended, and feet conjoined, as if fixed to a cross. It had six wings, two of which were elevated over the head, two extended as if for flight, and the other two veiling the entire body.

"When the blessed servant of the Most High saw this vision, he was filled with great wonder, but could not understand what its meaning was. Much and greatly did he rejoice to see the gracious and benign aspect with which the seraph looked upon himself, for its beauty was indescribable; but the bitterness of the cross and passion thus shown to him filled him with grief and fear. Thus he arose both sad and glad, joy and sorrow alternating within him. He considered anxiously what the vision might mean, and endeavoured with all his might to find an interpretation of it. And when he could find nothing by which it might be understood, and the novelty of the vision overwhelmed his heart, there began to appear in his hands and feet signs of nails such as he had just seen in the holy Crucified One who stood over him."

The Three Companions give the story in almost the same words, the only difference in their narrative being, that the Seraph does not itself display the form of the cross, but "carried within its wings the form as of a beautiful man crucified, the hands and feet extended as on a cross, showing forth most clearly the image of our Lord Jesus . . . . When this vision disappeared," they add, "a wonderful ardour of love remained in his soul; and in his flesh still more marvellously appeared the Stigmata of the Lord Jesus Christ, which the man of God carried concealed to his death, not willing to publish the secret of God."

The account given by Bonaventura is also identical with the first:—

"On a certain morning about the festival of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, while he was praying on the mountain-side, he beheld a Seraph, having six wings all on fire and glittering, descend from the height of heaven, and when with exceeding swift flight he had come to a part of the air close to the man of God, there appeared between his wings the form of one crucified, having the hands and feet stretched out according to the fashion of a cross, and fixed to the

cross. Two wings were raised above his head, two were stretched out for flight, and two covered his whole body. And when he saw this he was sore amazed, and mingled joy and sorrow filled his heart. For he rejoiced at the gracious look with which he saw that he was regarded by Christ under the form of the Seraph; but the nailing to the cross pierced his soul with the sword of grief and pity. He marvelled greatly at the sight of a vision so past finding out, knowing that the infirmity of the Passion could in nowise agree with the immortal nature of a Seraphic being.

"At length, from it he understood by the revelation of the Lord, that a vision of this kind had, by the foreknowledge of God, been so presented to his sight that the friend of Christ might know that he, not through martyrdom of the flesh, but by kindling of the spirit, was to be altogether transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified.

"The vision therefore, disappearing, left a wondrous fire in his heart, and a no less wondrous sign imprinted on his flesh. For immediately on his hands and feet there began to appear the marks of nails, just as he had but a little before seen them in the form of the Crucified One."

Celano, we have already said, wrote three years after the death of Francis, and must have been in possession of everything then known and believed on the subject. The Three Companions did not compose their narrative until twenty years after his death; but they were his constant companions during his life, and two out of the three are reported to have been with him on the Mount Alverno. Bonaventura is the latest of all. His work was written in 1263, thirty-seven years after the death of the saint; but he had lived all his life among those who had known and loved Francis, and had the fullest information at his command. We repeat these particulars in order that the reader may be fully able to appreciate the value of the testimony. Nothing could be more satisfactory, at the first glance, than the evidence of witnesses so near and so certain to be well informed. Before dis-

cussing this question, we proceed to the end of the wonderful story, in order that every detail may be found in its proper place. Bonaventura's description of the Stigmata themselves, which coincides exactly with every other account, is as follows :—

" His hands and his feet appeared pierced through the midst with nails, the heads of the nails being seen in the insides of the hands and upper part of the feet, and the points on the reverse side. The heads of the nails in the hands and feet were round and black, and the points somewhat long and bent, as if they had been turned back. On the right side, as if it had been pierced by a lance, was the mark of a red wound, from which the sacred blood often flowed and stained his tunic."

When Francis saw (as the story goes) these marvellous marks appear in his flesh, his first impulse was to conceal them,—" Because it is written," says Bonaventura, " that it is good to conceal the secret of the King, therefore this man, who was conscious of so royal a secret, endeavoured to conceal its sacred origin from the eyes of all men." He does not seem to have mentioned what had happened to him to any one on the mountain, nor even when the time had come to go home, and the four went slowly back much hindered by his weakness. When they had returned to the Portiuncula he was still silent, though with signs about him which attracted the wondering curiosity of the brethren. Fra Illuminato, whose counsel had more than once been resorted to by Francis, saw (Bonaventura tells us) that something marvellous had happened to his master, which is a further proof that Francis himself had made no communication on the subject. Probably the insight of this wise monk was made all the clearer by the investigations and guesses

of the others. "Brother," he said, "not only for thine own sake, but for the sake of others, thou knowest that the divine mysteries are made known to thee. And therefore it seems to me that thou shouldest fear to conceal this which thou hast received for the benefit of many, lest thou shouldest be condemned for hiding the talent committed to thy care." At these words, adds Bonaventura, the holy man was so moved that, though he was accustomed to say on other occasions, "*Secretum meum mihi*," (my secret is my own,) he now related with great fear all the course of the aforesaid vision, adding that He who had appeared to him had said to him other things, which he must never, so long as he should live, reveal to any man.

This is the only occasion on which Francis is said to have told what had happened to him, and we have this only on the authority of Bonaventura. The Three Companions, who claim to represent not only themselves, but also Bernard, Masseo, Egidio, and others of the brethren, and to have derived from them all the information they could give, say only that it was impossible he could altogether hide it from his familiar companions; while Celano congratulates the happy Elias, who, alone of the Order, had seen, and the happy Ruffino, who had touched the sacred wounds, thus evidently ignoring any explicit account of them given by Francis to his brethren. Thus, then, while the three great early authorities concur almost completely in every detail of this wonderful occurrence, only one of them goes the length of asserting that Francis himself ever said a word about it, and none of them say, "I saw." One of the Three Companions is that Ruffino whom Celano calls happy, as having been permitted, during some of his personal ministrations to his master, to

touch the always bleeding wound. But, when he himself takes pen in hand, Ruffino makes no statement to justify this. He and the others relate the event with calm historical impartiality, without ever being moved to say that "*I* saw," or "*We* saw," which might have settled the question, or at least given it a much more solid proof than any which now exists. Neither does Leo, who is allowed to have been the confessor and secretary of Francis, assert anything as of his personal knowledge. Bonaventura, whose information must have been chiefly drawn from the old men of the Order, who most probably had by this time heard so many stories about the matter as to have got confused as to which was fact and which supposition—alone mentions the disclosure made by Francis himself; and even Bonaventura dismisses it, as it were, from the consciousness of Francis during the rest of his life—never making him refer to it, or so much as mention any more, whatever straits or exultations he might be in, the marvellous marks he carried about with him. This evident silence on the part of the saint, broken only once (if broken at all), is singularly significant; for Francis was just the literal-minded man who might, in all holy simplicity, have impressed such marks upon himself, and ever after have regarded them with a certain joy and pride, as feeling that he was to a small extent, but yet really, bearing about with him in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. And nothing could be more strange, if true, than that, even in his most private retirement, even to his dearest friends, he never opened with tremulous rapture the breast of his tunic, or held up to them in blessing or in counsel the hands marked with the nails.

Such is the history of the event which appears to be

so fully supported by contemporary evidence. We are not disposed to beg the whole question by asserting in our turn that such a miracle is unworthy of credence because it is incomprehensible. It is not a matter of doctrine which is in question, but a matter of fact. Contemporary witnesses, of perfect trustworthiness and high character, believed in it, and vouch for it. It is not an after-thought, a pious invention for the use of a canonizing pope, but the evident belief of the time, arising out of something in the life of Francis which attracted the wonder and curiosity and eager guesses of his companions. With a few exceptions, and these perhaps sufficiently explainable, the wonder was received with perfect faith by his generation. It was affirmed and proclaimed authoritatively by two popes who were his personal friends, and must have had means of knowing whether the tale was true or false. One of them, indeed, Pope Alexander IV., Bonaventura tells us, publicly asserted that he had himself seen the mysterious wounds ; though this statement is not justified by anything in Alexander's bulls on the subject. But it is seldom that a mass of evidence so complete can be adduced for any event so remote as this ; and at the first glance the testimony in favour of the reality of the Stigmata seems to be overwhelming.

This is, of course, the great matter for the historical student. It seems to us completely beyond the question to inquire, as does the German Hase, in his otherwise sympathetic biography of the saint, "How could the Stigmata of the Seraph be seen, since his body was covered by two of his wings: And how could these Stigmata be communicated to Francis of Assisi, since there is no intimation here, as in later legends of a similar description, of the impression made by an embrace, or of rays of crim-

soned light proceeding from the wounds of the apparition?" Such inquiries have, in reality, nothing to do with the question; for if the Stigmata were made at all, it is a matter of very inferior importance how they were made, so long as their divine and miraculous origin is admitted. It is of very much greater importance to note that the details of this vision could be known only from Francis himself; and that only Bonaventura, and none of his contemporaries, allow that he spoke on the subject at all; while, of all the other witnesses, there is none who says, "I myself saw the outward appearances on his hands and his feet." Leo, Ruffino, and Angelo, not only bear no such testimony, but they do not even claim to have seen the Stigmata after his death, though they tell us that the mysterious marks were seen of many brethren and laymen. Leo, at least, if not the others, was present when Francis died, and must, one would think, have seen anything miraculous that appeared on the person of his master; but he does not say that he saw these.

The only witness who remains to be quoted, and who comes first in actual chronological order, is that Elias whom we have named so often, the ambitious ascetic, in whose statesmanlike mind the idea of the Order, as separate from the brethren, had already dawned, and whose after-life proved him to be a man not over-scrupulous in means used. Of all the testimony given on the subject, his is the earliest, and perhaps the most direct. It is in the letter which, as Vicar-General of the Order, he wrote to the brethren in France, to intimate the death of Francis, that the story first appears. "I announce to you," he says, "a great joy and a great miracle. The world has never seen such a wonder, except in the person of the Son of God. A short time before his death, our

Brother and Father appeared as one crucified, having in his body five wounds which are truly the *stigmata* of Christ; for his feet and his hands had, as it were, the marks of nails fixed in the flesh, keeping the scars and showing the blackness of iron, while the side seemed pierced with a lance, and bled frequently." This is the first intimation of the miracle, and upon it, though with such differences as might naturally expand the story upon inquiry, the narratives of the early biographers were no doubt founded. It was a private communication, intended, not for the world, but for the brethren; and it has all the brevity and seriousness of a true statement of facts. Hase, whom we have just quoted, separates it from the other testimony, and goes so far as to attribute to Elias the fabrication of the Stigmata on the person of his dead master, chiefly on the ground that his letter is the origin of the whole, and that it bears more decided marks of personal knowledge than any of the others. This theory, however, seems to us wholly untenable. Elias was ambitious; he was insubordinate; he preferred his own opinion to that of his Master; but self-will and ambition do not necessarily imply falsehood and deceit, and we are not aware of any other incident in the life of Elias which justifies such an accusation. Neither is it true that his statement is more authoritative than that of the others. He does not say, "These marks were seen by my eyes, or touched by my hands." If they existed at all, he must have seen them; and he affirms most distinctly that they did exist: but he does not put himself forward as a witness. Thus he appears to us on exactly the same ground as Ruffino and the others, who, we are informed, had positively seen and touched; yet do not think it necessary to rest the fact upon

their personal testimony, but content themselves with saying that it was.

This curious absence of personal affirmation puzzles the student. It is the grand distinction of all laws of evidence that they reject hearsay and general belief and insist upon particular and individual testimony. The tribunal of history however cannot be so rigid as that of justice, and must often content itself with the echo across the breadth of centuries of something less positive than that "I saw," which is the grand bulwark of fact against fancy. And while we admit that no evidence can be thoroughly satisfactory which does not include this, we must at the same time remember that the kind of personal asseveration which we demand was not wanted in that age. The world was content to be informed by witnesses worthy of belief that certain facts were, and did not insist upon particulars as to when they had been seen, or who had seen them. The letter of Elias is in exactly the same form and tone as the evidence of the other brethren. And if he does not think it necessary to say, "I saw," why should Ruffino have thought it necessary? Both of them make their record with perfect composure and historical gravity, apparently not considering the matter as so slight an affair that one man's testimony or another could shake it, or mingling any heat of discussion with their tale. They do not go out of their way to meet doubt, as inventors of a religious fable are apt to do; they do not even seem to realize its possibility. True, doubt did exist even then, but where? In the person of a German bishop, far away over those Alps, where news travelled so slowly, in the heart of a country which had sent away the first Franciscan missionaries out of simple ignorance of their object and mission. What was the bishop of Olmutz

to Leo and Ruffino, shut in within that inner circle of the Apennines which made a double wall between them and the sceptical German? Their own audience did not doubt, did not demand from them any personal assertion. Elias, writing from the very bedside of the dead founder, is as quietly historical as are the other brethren who made their record twenty years later. It is a defect to us, but it does not seem to have been a defect to them.

Another powerful argument against the theory that the story of the Stigmata was invented by Elias, lies in the fact that the other witnesses could not have been deceived into giving it their support. Not only the Three Companions themselves, but Bernard, Masseo, and Egidio, whom they claim to represent, must have had some knowledge of the transaction: they could not have given their countenance to the lie in ignorance, but must have done it wittingly; and were we to receive such an explanation, we should be compelled to believe that they thus adopted and supported the fiction invented by their personal enemy, a man who betrayed the trust of Francis, and brought trouble and confusion into the community. Bernard was at the bedside of his lifelong friend when he died, as well as Elias: he was profoundly opposed to Elias, as also was Leo; and it seems incredible that they could have conspired together to repeat and confirm a lie invented by Elias, after years of a hard struggle with him, and when he had become the enemy of the Order, the enemy of the Pontiff—a scandal to the convent which had trained him. Neither does it seem possible to imagine that Elias in his apostasy should not have betrayed and exposed the conspiracy had such a thing existed. The saintly reputation of Francis and the glory of the Order must have been

of small account to the excommunicated monk in open rebellion against both Church and Order, and with all the power of the Emperor to back him—an Emperor to whom the unveiling of such an imposture would no doubt have been sweet. But neither Elias, apostate and excommunicated, nor the indignant and outraged brethren who cast him forth, say a word which could lead us to suppose that such an exposure was in the power of either side. Agreeing in nothing else, they agree with every appearance of good faith in their testimony as to this.

Thus far the evidence, though unsatisfactory, or at least not fully satisfactory, seems beyond attack. But a crowd of difficulties assail us whenever we return to the life of Francis. In these last two years, over which a mysterious shadow hangs—a shadow of weakness, seclusion, and withdrawal from the activities of existence—the Stigmata, if they existed, would seem to have been ignored by their possessor. He does not, it is evident, say a word about them, even to his dearest friend; no one receives his confidence on this point. He lives as if that wonderful moment had not been. And yet it is equally clear that the visit to Alverno was, one way or other, a great crisis in his life. His existence underwent some change in that memorable and mysterious seclusion. Something of awe and wonder henceforward breathes about that humanest and gentlest of men. We no longer hear of him as errant upon the blazing Umbrian ways, going from town to town and from castle to castle. His life seems henceforward almost as much hid in God as if he had already passed those solemn boundaries which separate the living from the dead. His bodily sufferings increased, if not in consequence of those miraculous wounds, at least in a mysterious, unex-

plained way. But not a word does he say himself to throw any light upon the mystery ; though eager eyes peer wistfully at him on all sides with that curious sense of something to find out, with which the popular mind recognizes, as by instinct, the existence of a mystery. After Alverno everything is changed ; his strength fails daily ; his eyes fail, worn out by the tears he is always shedding. Weakness, blindness, exhaustion, begin to steal upon him. It was perhaps only the breaking up of a constitution which he had tried in every way beyond its strength ; or was it that the anguish of a secret martyrdom, the bleeding of an unseen wound, stole away his strength day by day ? Who can tell ? He himself never says so, never gives a sign out of the silence ; but slowly, cheerfully, with never-failing patience, feels his life ebb away from him, and turns his face towards the setting sun.

Meantime, it would seem the whole country began to thrill round him with mysterious curiosity, wonder, and awe. Nothing can be more remarkable than the perfect faith with which the story, when fully revealed, seems to have been received. Was it that the brethren, as they asked their alms from door to door, breathed whispers of some wonder which they themselves had not yet fathomed ; or that the country-folk perceived why it was that he tottered so feebly along the hilly roads, he who had once stepped so lightly by mountain and plain ? The thin, worn hands, brown with perpetual exposure, and no doubt subject to many a scar of toil, would probably never reveal to the ordinary spectator the specks of the blackened nail-heads, if these strange ornaments were there ; and still less his feet, half hid with the falling tunic, dusty, and brown, and travel-worn. But we are told that he wore his sleeves long to conceal the marks, and was no longer

able to walk with comfort, but generally rode on an ass —a circumstance which of course might arise simply from weakness. The fashion of his comings and goings was, however, changed. Once, we are informed, his mind was so rapt as he rode slowly along, that he was unaware of the crowds that pressed round him, unaware of passing over the rough streets of a town, and through its guarded gates, and asked, after he had gone through it, why they were so long of arriving at San Severino? Nothing can be more significant of the difference between the mystic sufferer—with his heart and thoughts in heaven, and a mist over all his senses—and that lively, tender, quick-sighted observer, whose eye caught the lamb among the goats, whose ear was awake to every bird on the branches. He had been on the Mount of vision, and his eyes were dazzled and his ear absorbed with echoes of celestial music. His life and labours were almost accomplished: his reward had all but begun.

It is curious, however, to find how much more explicit and personal is the posthumous evidence (if we may so describe it), the testimony of dreams and visions, than that of fact. The name of the monk, for example, who went up to Alverno to meditate over the wonderful narrative, and had there a vision of the saint, who satisfied all his doubts, is given us without any vagueness, along with date and place, and everything that can confirm his tale. Francis was a great deal more communicative to him than he appears to have been to his dearest friends while on earth. Pope Gregory IX. had also a vision to the same purport, which we are told all about, though we are never told authoritatively that he (our Cardinal Ugolino in the old days) ever saw the Stigmata during the lifetime of Francis. The difference is very curious, and

we cannot say that our faith in the dreams which are so well authenticated equals our faith in Leo, Angelo, and Ruffino, who make no assertion on their own personal credit. The evidence altogether is of a kind which it is almost equally difficult to accept and to reject. There is sufficient weight of testimony, when fully considered, to stagger the stoutest unbeliever; and there is too much vagueness and generality to make the most believing mind quite comfortable in its faith.

Were we to treat the story as proved and authentic we should find ourselves plunged into a whole world of unexplored wonders, which we can neither ignore nor interpret. It is a truism to say that every great religious movement is attended by some demonstration of power, unknown and mysterious, which baffles all the explanations of philosophy. The age of miracles, we say, is past; but there are a hundred wonders, more surprising than absolute miracle, which spring up about us, whenever we endeavour to understand the history of religion in the world, and its action upon men. Signs and portents attend every crisis of that history. From Savonarola to Wesley, and from Wesley to our own day, every great spiritual awakening has been accompanied by phenomena which are quite incomprehensible, which none but the vulgar mind can attribute to trickery or imposture, and which we find it difficult enough to ascribe solely to the highly strained feeling and nervous excitement which might be supposed to be working in the hearts of its subjects. Every explanation that has ever been given of the Tongues, of the trances of the Exstatica, of the cries and struggles of those newly brought into the Church, of all the vague mysterious wonders which attend every spiritual crisis, has failed to make them compre-

hensible. It is difficult to attribute to the direct interposition of God, incidents which are really not moral incidents at all, and which have no results important enough to justify such an agency. Yet we cannot assert, without a rare amount of disbelief in human nature, and cynical disdain of our fellow-creatures, that the volition of man has had to do with these extraordinary phenomena. To this class of events we should conclude the Stigmata belonged, if we could fully persuade ourselves to receive the Stigmata as proved by the ordinary laws of evidence. But in the meantime we are unable to grant even so much as this. The evidence is not so complete or satisfactory as to warrant us in thus acknowledging and classifying the event.

CHAPTER XVII.

HIS LAST YEARS.

FRANCIS returned to his convent, as we have said after this memorable seclusion. If he said anything about the mystery which had overshadowed him, it was but once. His powers, failing as they were, were all concentrated on the continuance of his work, and for a little time he seems to have carried it on as before, with a fervour of spirit which shone more and more through the weakness of his flesh. The pitcher was broken, and the light glimmered through at every crack and crevice. "Of all his body he made a tongue," says Celano. He spoke not only by the voice, which sometimes failed through feebleness, but through the very sufferings of the worn-out frame, which had laboured so long and so hardly, and yet in the hour of its mortal languor would not consent to rest. A certain haste would seem to have been upon him in this last remnant of his life. Death was coming—the "Sister Death" for which he thanked God; but so long as the days succeeded each other, and human work was possible, he could not suffer himself to rest; for the time was coming in which rest would swallow him up, and labour should be possible no more. Elias here appears in a character more amiable than we have yet seen him. The man was a man like others, with soft places in his heart, and not a mere conven-

tional figure of monkish severity and pride. Francis had elected him in the place of a mother to him, Celano tells us ; and tenderly did he fulfil his charge. He used a gentle compulsion to make his patient take the medicine and nourishment which were necessary to him, commanding him to receive it in the name of the Son of God—an adjuration which it was not in Francis's loyal heart to resist. "The holy father humbly received this sermon and admonition," as he had done all his life, welcoming any reminder of his own imperfections, and seeking even abuse with a quaint simplicity which will often amuse the reader. When he was called names and treated as a person unworthy, he was glad ; it suited, he said, the son of Pietro Bernardone. But the melting away and failure of his strength is visible in every line of the record. And soon a new ailment made itself manifest, more painful in its immediate effects than even the deadly harm which was going on within him. His eyes were affected to such an extent that he was threatened with entire blindness. No doubt this danger must have moved a soul so full of natural delight in all the loveliness of earth and sky, to unusual apprehension. It does not seem that he refused or resisted in this instance the persuasions of his friends, but, when nothing could be done for him at home, went with docility to Rieti, where there seems to have existed a famous oculist—perhaps the first journey he ever made for his own personal needs all his life. The Pope and his court were at that time at Rieti, we are told ; and so was Cardinal Ugolino, to whose special solicitations his journey must be attributed.

We borrow from the *Fioretti* an account of the circumstances preceding this journey, which shows very clearly how anxious his friends, both at home and in

the greater world, had become on his account. This little sketch brings us softly down from the mystery and solemnity of the events which have just passed, into the familiar warmth of the Italian night, the tent erected out of doors, the homely annoyances of disturbed rest—and the Divine compassion that breathes through all.

"St. Francis being once sorely afflicted with his eyes, Cardinal Ugolino, protector of the Order, for the great love he bore him, wrote to him that he should come to him at Rieti, where were the best doctors for the eyes. Then St. Francis, having received the letter of the Cardinal, went first to St. Damian, where was St. Chiara, most devoted bride of Christ, to give her some comfort, and then to go to Rieti. And while St. Francis was there, the night following his eyes grew worse, so that he could not even see the light; so that, since he was not able to depart, St. Chiara made him a little cell of rushes, in which he might the better rest. But St. Francis, between his suffering and the multitude of mice, which caused him exceeding great annoy, was not able to rest the least in the world, either by day or by night. And as his suffering increased he began to think and to know that it was a scourge of God for his sins, and he began to thank God with all his heart and mouth; and then he cried with a loud voice and said, 'O my Lord, worthy am I of this, and of far worse. O my Lord Jesus Christ, who hast shown Thy mercy on us sinners in divers pains and torments of the body, grant grace and strength to me, Thy lamb, that through no weakness or torment or pain I may fall from Thee.' And at this prayer there came to him a voice from heaven which said, 'Francis, answer me: were all the earth gold, and all the seas and springs and streams balm, and were all the mountains and hills and rocks precious stones; and thou hadst found another treasure more precious than these things, as gold is more precious than earth, and balm than water, and precious stones than mountains and rocks,—and with this weakness that far more precious treasure were given thee, oughtest thou not to be with it well content and very light of heart?' St. Francis answered, 'Lord, I am unworthy of so precious a treasure.' And the voice of

God said to him, 'Be of good cheer, Francis, for this is the treasure of life eternal, which I have in store for thee; and now from henceforth I invest thee with it, and this weakness and affliction is earnest of that blessed treasure.' Then St. Francis called his companion with exceeding great joy at so glorious a promise, and said, 'Let us go to the Cardinal;' and first comforting St. Chiara with holy words, and bidding her a humble farewell, he took the road to Rieti."

When they reached the city of Rieti, the narrative goes on to say, crowds came to meet the saint, in numbers so great that he and his companion found it impossible to enter the town. The narrow gateways and drawbridges, the road made strait for purposes of defence, were blocked up before the two humble brethren. Francis took the refuge which was natural to him under such circumstances. He went into a little church two miles from the city —a humble rural place, with its little presbytery and the vineyard which surrounded it. As soon as the Rietonese knew, they crowded to this resting-place, and filling up every vacant space from which they could see or hear their famous visitor, made such havoc among the vines that the poor priest of the place, looking on with melancholy countenance, saw his vintage spoiled, and in his heart repented the impulse of kindness which had made him open his church to a visitor of such overwhelming popularity. Francis, always sympathetic, saw the doleful countenance of his host, and divined at once that he had brought poverty and destruction with him, instead of the blessing and peace which he prayed should rest on every house he entered. The reader will also divine without difficulty that a miracle followed, and that the trodden-down and ruined vines produced that year on the tops of their branches a greater harvest than did the entire

vineyard at its most prosperous season. Such an incident may be taken for granted in any such narrative.

The quietness of the place, its distance from, and yet vicinity to, the city, seems to have pleased Francis. He begged to be allowed to remain there for some days, to rest after his journey, and no doubt to secure the still, cool evenings, the silent moments of the night, for himself; for the Papal court, as we have said, was at Rieti, and there is little doubt that repose would have been difficult to attain amid all the busy idlers and curious attendants to whom the humble prophet of Umbria would be a wonder and prodigy. We can but suppose, however, that this was a very temporary pause; for shortly after we find him at Rieti, undergoing the operation for which he had come. The unscientific narrative has no name to give to the disease in his eyes, but informs us that it was produced by much weeping, the belief of Francis being that "whosoever would attain to a life of perfection must cleanse his conscience daily with abundance of tears." These tears the physicians persuaded him to restrain, Bonaventura tells us, threatening him with final blindness if he did not do so; but Francis was unmoved by such an argument. "It is not fitting, Brother Medico," he said, "that for the love of that light which we have here below in common with the flies, we should shut out the least ray of the eternal light which visits us from above; for the soul has not received the light for the sake of the body, but the body for the sake of the soul. I would, therefore, choose rather to lose the sight of the body than to repress those tears by which the interior eyes are purified, that so they may see God." A most characteristic piece of reasoning, most like the man to whom, all his life, his body had been so secondary

an object—the mere Brother Ass which bore the burden of his labours and sufferings. When he had been examined and exhorted thus fruitlessly, the operation took place—an operation hard enough to encounter, but met by Francis with the same cheerful, patient bearing and devoutness which distinguished his entire life.

"But when he was counselled by the physicians, and earnestly besought by the brethren, to suffer cautery for his relief, the man of God humbly yielded, because he saw that this would be at once both salutary and grievous. The surgeon, therefore, being sent for, came and placed his iron in the fire to heat it. But the servant of Christ, comforting his body, which was shuddering with dread, began to speak to the fire as to a friend, saying, 'O Brother Fire, before all other things the Most High hath created thee of exceeding comeliness, powerful, beauteous, and useful; be thou to me, in this my hour, merciful, be courteous. I beseech the Great Lord who hath created thee, that he may temper for me thy heat, that I may be able patiently to endure thy burning me.' And when he had finished his prayer over the iron, glistening white with heat, he made the sign of the cross, and then remained stedfastly unflinching. The hissing iron was plunged into the tender flesh, and from the ear to the eyebrow the cautery was drawn. When he was asked concerning the pain of the fire, the holy man made answer: 'Praise,' said he to the brethren, 'praise ye the Most High; for I truly tell you I neither felt the fire's heat, nor pain of body.' And turning to the physician, 'If it be not well burnt,' said he, 'thrust in again.' And the physician, beholding in the weakness of the flesh such wondrous strength of spirit, marvelled and extolled the miracle of God, and said, 'I tell you, brethren, I have seen strange things to-day.' For since to so great a purity had he come, that flesh with spirit, and spirit with God, agreed in wondrous harmony, it was by God's ordering, that the creature, obeying its Creator, was in a wondrous manner subject to his will and command."

It is a very curious fact that during this visit to Rieti not a word is said of the Stigmata. These

mysterious marks had, according to the story, been recently given; they occasioned, as we are told elsewhere, continual suffering, and their existence was already known to some, and guessed at by many of the brethren. It is almost impossible to believe that Francis could have entirely concealed so great an event from Ugolino, or that Ugolino knowing it, a wonder so far surpassing ordinary wonders, should not have at least solemnly confided it to the Pope and put it upon record. It is true that here was an opportunity which made it possible that "several of the cardinals," as Bonaventura tells us, of whom he supposes Pope Alexander to have been one, should have seen the marks. But there is not a word of this in the history. We are left entirely in the dark as to what Ugolino thought of the matter, or what was the opinion of the surrounding bystanders, the men most qualified to decide upon the character of such phenomena. No doubt the pain of so tremendous an operation as that which Francis here underwent might well have withdrawn the mind of an ordinary man from ordinary matters. But nothing, one would think, could ever withdraw his mind from the painful honour which God had bestowed upon him—the suffering and glory with which his life was crowned. Yet he does not say a word, nor does any one else, so far as the reader can perceive: there is no hint given by Elias, no whisper from any attendant brother of those stains of blood upon the under garment, nor recommendation to any bystander to look at the blackened marks upon the Master's hands, which he must have raised often in blessing. Nothing can be more curious than the entire absence of all reference, and even of all apparent consciousness that anything so wonderful had happened so short a time before. Perhaps it is

possible that, in the bustle of the court, Francis and his affairs might have been thrust into a corner, and that even Ugolino himself might have been so occupied as to be unable to give as much time as he usually did to his visitor. But yet the man who said that he never had been in trouble so great but Francis's benign looks and conversation would set him right, must, it is certain, have found some means of private intercourse with his friend; and we cannot believe that Francis could have shut up such a strange event in his heart, or refused to share with the friend who was to him as a brother, and who was at the same time the protector of the Order and interested in everything that promoted its prosperity, a secret which was calculated to cover the Order with glory, even though exemplified in his private person. But there is not the least reason to suppose that he did so. Not a word drops from his mouth; not a hint escapes his companion. The great marvelling and curiosity which filled the Assisi convent would seem to have been altogether quenched in the mind of the brother who accompanied Francis. Bonaventura even puts this event at an earlier period of his life, separating it entirely from the later mysterious narrative; and it does not seem to have occurred to any one that here was an occasion when it would have been impossible for Francis to have evaded some confidential communication on such an important subject.

So far as we are informed, the cautery did little good to his eyes; at best, the benefit was very temporary, if there was any benefit. And probably before this time it had become necessary, either in consequence of his blindness or his weakness, that he should be continually guarded and accompanied in all his movements. There is something wonderfully

pathetic in the reserved and sober narrative of this period of his life. As far as his weakness would permit, he continued his old circuits about the town of Rieti, preaching whenever it was possible; but it would seem that some sense of failing strength and inability to serve God in this familiar way, as he was wont, must sometimes have sent a pang through his heart: for a desire seized him to return to his earlier labours, to go out and take charge of the lepers, and serve the poor, as he had done at the very beginning of his career; and so strenuous were his endeavours for this end, or so great the terror of the community lest with his failing sight he should fall into some bodily peril, that four brethren were elected to watch over him day and night. They were all men of fortitude and devout spirit, pleasing God, holy and gracious to men, as Celano tells us; but he does not mention their names, lest by much praise they should become vain. They were like four columns of the house which Francis had made for God's service, he adds, and there can be little doubt that they had to exercise a certain mild coercion over their Master—perhaps to watch lest in his feebleness he should stray to some neighbouring leper-house to nurse the sufferers who were scarcely so weak as he—perhaps lest he should stumble upon the hilly roads, which were not so familiar to him as those about Assisi. Such was the weakness into which the active and cheerful Francis, always ready for the hardest labour, and fearing nothing he might encounter on his way, had fallen.

"He began to suffer from so many infirmities," says Bonaventura, "that there was scarcely one of his members but was tormented by increased pain and suffering. At last, by reason of these various heavy

and continued sufferings, his flesh was consumed, and there remained nothing more but the skin attached to the bones." Not for this, however, did Francis lose his courage. He kept his brave countenance through all, jesting gently with his pangs, and calling them "My sisters," as he called the innocent birds and everything of God's making. When he could not walk, he had himself carried through the neighbourhood, preaching to the people, who flocked round him; and it would be impossible to imagine any picture more affecting than that of the dying saint on his litter, half blind and almost wholly worn out, but still preaching the gospel of his Master. "Let us begin over again," was his cry: "up to this moment we have done nothing for God." And thus with continual toil and devotion, he thrust from his mind every opportunity for repining or discontented thought. He was as ready to bear all the pangs common to human weakness, and more than all, that his Master saw fit to inflict upon him, as he was for the mysterious and ecstatic agonies of Alverno—those trances of high communion in which pain and the sensations of the flesh were forgotten. One day, Bonaventura tells us, when he was very ill, "a certain simple brother" was wrung to the heart by the sight of his sufferings. "Brother, pray to God that He would deal more gently with thee," cried this sympathetic soul; "for His hand, methinks, is more heavy upon thee than is meet." Francis turned upon his pitying companion with a certain tender indignation. "If I did not know thy purity and simplicity," he said, "I should from henceforward abhor thy company, because thou hast dared to blame the Divine judgments which are executed upon me." And then in the fulness of his heart he threw himself upon the

ground, as he had done in the little *celluzza*, the hut of rushes in the convent garden at St. Damian's, and kissing the soil, cried out, "I thank Thee, O Lord my God, for these my sufferings, and I beseech Thee to increase them a hundredfold; for this shall be most acceptable to me that Thou spare not to afflict me, for the fulfilment of Thy holy will is to me an overflowing consolation."

His stay at Rieti seems to have been prolonged for a considerable time, during which period he made excursions into the adjoining country, reaching even as far as the borders of the Neapolitan kingdom. He was on his way home, and had reached the town of Nursia, at the foot of the Apennines, when he fell ill once more, his disease assuming still more serious features. He had perpetual recurrences of nausea; his legs began to swell, and all his symptoms pointed to a speedy conclusion. When the people of Assisi heard of this detention, they were seized with a wild terror, most characteristic of the time and race, lest he should die at a distance, and the town be deprived of his relics. When they heard of the risk they were running, they sent off messengers in all haste to bring back the saint, who was not only their townsman, but their property, destined to be the glory of the place. The messengers were sent by the Senate, and apparently in an official character, so troubled were the Assisans at the thought of losing so valuable a possession. On their way home, Francis and his escort paused at the little town of Gargiano, where they rested during the heat of the day. It would seem that the messengers and the attendant brethren had gone into the village together to buy food for their mid-day meal, for the Brothers Minor themselves are not likely to have had any money for such a purpose. The village probably was

very small, and unused to make provision for the needs of travellers; and the hungry band came back disconsolate, having been unable to obtain anything. Francis where they had left him, probably in his litter under the shade of the wayside trees, or in the cool quiet of the village church, received them on their return with that partial satisfaction which the best of men cannot but feel to see their own prevision fulfilled. "You have found nothing," he said, "because you trust in your *flies* (money) more than in the Lord. Go back and humbly ask for alms, for the love of God; and do not vainly suppose that this is a vile thing, for God, the great Almsgiver, grants to all, both worthy and unworthy, all things needful as an alms." The brethren, thus recalled to their duty, went humbly back to the village to beg their much-needed meal. We are not told whether the escort accompanied them this second time; but it is to be supposed that the Assisan cavaliers shared the alms with which immediately Francis and his companions were supplied. The villagers, no doubt, came also, when they heard who was the illustrious personage who had halted at their gates; for the story goes on to say that "the hearts of the poor men who dwelt in that place being pierced by the Divine inspiration, they offered, not their provisions only, but themselves. "Thus it befell," adds Bonaventura, "that the necessity, which could not be relieved by money, was supplied by the rich and abundant poverty of the saint."

It would appear that Francis rallied on being brought home; at least, we find that a little while after he is able to undertake another journey to some villa or village in the neighbourhood of Sienna, for the better air and medical aid to be had there. It was only six months before his death, in the spring of

1226, when he set out on this last vain pursuit of health. We are not told how long he stayed; but that all his worst symptoms returned, and that once more the people of Assisi became anxious to secure, not his life, but at least his death at home. This time it was Elias, who no doubt was as anxious as the Assisans that the head-quarters of the Order at the Portiuncula should be the future shrine of the saint, who was sent after him. The failing flame seems to have leaped up in the socket at the sight of his Vicar, the man in the Order who was at once most important and most dangerous to it, whom he had already elected, deposed, and re-established, and to whom, notwithstanding his unlikeness to himself, and all the trouble he had caused, the heart of Francis seems to have clung. Elias conducted his friend and father to Cortona, to a cell or hermitage near to the Lake of Perugia, in the very heart of the country which had been the scene of all Francis's labours. Here the weary sufferer remained for some little time, tended, it is supposed, by the friends and relations of Elias, who belonged to the place, until a great desire seized him to return to Assisi. He was very ill, almost at the end of his strength, unable to do anything but lie in his litter as they carried him along those familiar ways. The whole town came out to meet him when he drew near Assisi, full of a grim sort of rejoicing, which it is to be hoped the tender and friendly soul to whom love was dear did not suspect. They were glad not so much of his coming as their lifelong friend and teacher, but of their final acquisition, beyond all chance of losing it, of his worn and weary body, which was so soon to become the holy and blessed relics of a saint. They took him, with joy and exultation, to the palace of the bishop, his

strength probably being unequal to the further way. This was the last of all his journeys—the end of his active life. Henceforward the only work he had before him was that easy one of dying, which he was to accomplish, as it were, in sight of the whole country, with an entire population anxiously looking on. His canonization had been decided already by popular unanimous decree, and even a certain impatience to have it done would seem to have animated the general mind. But in the Portiuncula there was woe and sorrow. And who can doubt that Clara among her maidens wept at St. Damian's, unable to obey the first instinct of a woman's mind, to hasten to the succour of her friend. She could not go to nurse him, or receive his last words; the nun could only pray for her monastic brother. But simple Leo was with him, and Bernard, his oldest companion, and many who had loved, and served, and accompanied him in his wanderings and labours for years. Thus, with the eager people watching outside, and the anxious brethren within, with the melodies of heaven already beginning to steal into his ears, and blindness concealing from him the earth he had so much loved, Francis laid him down and prepared himself to die.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIS DEATH-BED.

FROM the time of Francis's arrival in the episcopal palace at Assisi, his history becomes that of a death-bed. The time had come at which, two years before, it had been intimated to him that he should die; and no rebellious wish, no lingering impulse of vitality, contradicted the heavenly vision. We are not told how long the time of his residence at Assisi was, but only that a few days before his death he had himself carried to the Portiuncula. As the litter-bearers with their burden, progressing slowly down the hill-path, came in sight of that humble but blessed spot, Francis, turning to the group of brethren that surrounded him, warned them to hold this cradle of the Order in all reverence and honour. "*Vedete, figli miei,*" (my sons,) said the dying father, "never give up this place. If you would go anywhere, or make any pilgrimage, return always to your home; for this is the holy house of God." Probably it was at the same time, and before entering the humble house he loved so well, that he caused his bearers to set down the litter on the ground, and, turning to where Assisi, the home of his youth, rose white upon the hill, gave his blessing to the town which had nurtured and cherished him, which had scorned and scoffed at him, and which had ended by falling prostrate at his feet, and longing for the breath to be out of his body that it might worship

him. No doubt his whole life passed like a dream before his blind eyes, as he turned them upwards towards the height. Clear in the sight of the spirit he must have seen that city, set upon a hill, and the open gate through which he had passed so often at the head of the joyous band of youthful troubadours, and again when cast out and forsaken in the lowest depths of poverty and humbleness. For aught we know, the father and mother who had cast him off might still have been surviving, with hearts that burned within them at all the wonders of their son's bitter but glorious life. No doubt he had brothers and sisters, and friends of his youth, at Assisi, every stone of which was familiar to him, and every house dear. He could see his birthplace no more, nor the shining on it of the cheerful light he loved; but still he could raise his hand, and say that last blessing by way of farewell.

When he had entered the convent, he betook himself to the other duties of a dying man. He called for pen and ink, and, with Angelo sitting by his bedside to write, dictated his last will. It is not so much a Will as a record. Its chief purpose seems to have been to impress upon the minds of his spiritual heirs, with a prevision of the strifes which were coming, the duty of absolute obedience to the self-denying principles of the Rule. His eye strays back over his life, setting forth as at first the principles that had moved him, and all that "the Lord revealed to me." Something of the effect of that last pause in the clear, soft autumnal air, that last turning of his face towards Assisi, and all the thoughts that accompanied his final blessing, must have lingered about him still. In his poor cell, as he lay, weary and blind, and dictated his last words, his life must have returned and wrapped itself around him — no longer an affair of mere years and days, but a complete, almost completed,

thing, which his soul thus gazing at, could see at last detached from himself. Pausing with his hand as it were on the very door of heaven, he makes his musing, gentle survey, with no regret, no passion, a composed and tranquil calm. He was but forty-four, and might have been still, had he thought of his own health or life half as much as he had thought of God's service, in the fulness of a man's strength. But not a single tone of sadness mingles in the simple record. He is a servant giving up his charge, a knight narrating his first battles—not a man dying before his time, or laying any last grasp of pathetic reluctance or regret upon the failing thread of life.

"'The Lord God had given to me, Brother Francis, to begin to work repentance, because, while I was yet in my sins, it seemed to me too painful to behold lepers; but the Lord Himself led me among them, and I wrought mercy with them. And when I left them, that which seemed to me painful was turned into sweetness of soul and body. A short time after this I gave up the world. And the Lord gave me such faith in His churches that I would thus simply adore and say, 'We adore Thee, most holy Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all Thy churches which are in all the world, and we bless Thee because, through Thy holy cross, Thou hast redeemed the world.' Afterwards the Lord gave me, and yet gives, so great faith in priests who live according to the rule of the holy Roman Church, on account of their order, that should they persecute me I would still have recourse to them. And had I as great wisdom as Solomon, and were to be with the poorest and most ignorant priests of this age, I would not preach in their churches against their will. And both them and all others I would fear, love, and honour as my lords. And I would not behold sin in them, because I discern in them the Son of God, and they are my lords. And for this reason I do this, because in this world I see no bodily token of the Son of God most high, except His most blessed body and blood, which they receive and alone administer to others. And these most holy mysteries I wish to be beyond all things honoured, and venerated, and richly enshrined. And

wherever His most holy name and written word may have been found in unseemly places, I desire that they should be collected, and put into some honourable place. And all theologians, and those who minister to us the most holy word of God, we ought to honour and venerate as those who give to us breath and life.

When the Lord entrusted to me the care of my brethren, no man showed me what I ought to do, but the Most High revealed to me that I ought to live according to the rule of the holy Gospel. And I simply, and in few words, caused a writing to be made, and the lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who took upon themselves that life, gave away to the poor all that they chanced to have. And they were content with one tunic, patched, as they required, within and without, together with a girdle and breeches; and we would not have more.

"We, the clergy, said daily the office, like other clergy, and the laymen said the Paternoster. And full willingly did we remain in poor and deserted churches, and we were unlearned, and servants of all men. And I laboured with my hands, and desire yet to labour; and I earnestly will that all the other brethren should labour at their calling as far as they honestly may. And let those who know not (a calling) learn, not for greed of receiving the wage of their labour, but for good example and for avoidance of idleness. And when the wage of our labour be not given us, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door.

This form of salutation hath the Lord revealed to me, that we should say, 'The Lord give thee peace.' Let the brethren take heed to themselves, not to accept the churches and dwellings which are built for them, unless they be such as befit the holy poverty which we have promised in the Rule, and let them dwell as strangers and pilgrims.

"I earnestly enjoin, by their obedience, all the brethren that, wheresoever they be, they shall not demand any letter (of privilege) in the court of Rome, either by themselves or by any advocate, be it for a church or for any other house, be it for the sake of preaching or on account of bodily persecution; but if they are not received in one place, let them fly to another, to work out their repentance with God's blessing. . . . .

"And let not the brethren say, 'This is another Rule; because this is the remembrance, the admonition, and the

exhortation—my Testament, which I, your weak brother Francis, leave to you, my brethren blessed, that the Rule which we have promised to the Lord we may observe in a more catholic way.

"And let the general minister and all the other ministers and guardians be bound by their obedience neither to add to nor take away from these words of mine.

"And let them always have this writing with them, as well as the Rule, and at all the chapters they hold, when they read the Rule let them also read these words. And I strictly command, by their obedience, all my brethren, clergy and lay, that they introduce no glosses into the Rule or these words, saying, 'Thus they should be understood;' but since the Lord gave to me purely and simply to speak and write the Rule and these words, thus ye shall simply and purely, and without gloss, understand them, and by the operation of holiness keep them to the end.

"And may whosoever shall have kept them, in heaven be filled with the blessing of the most high heavenly Father, and on earth be filled with the blessing of His dearly beloved Son, and of the most holy Spirit the Comforter, and all the heavenly virtues, and all the saints. And I, your weak brother Francis and your servant in the Lord, as far as I may, confirm for you, both within and without, that most holy blessing. Amen."

When Francis had thus finished all his external business, he turned to the lesser circle of the convent—the home of his special affections. Henceforward the outside world had faded away from his horizon; and his thoughts were occupied only by the little band of his brethren, and the dear and faithful friends who had comforted his laborious life. Among his works we find the fragment of a letter addressed to the Signora Giacobba di Settisoli, informing her of his illness, and begging her to come to him. It was Angelo, probably, as soon as the Will was finished and the Master's mind left free for his friendships and private affections, who wrote this letter. It is not known who Giacobba was; but it is thus Francis addressed her from his death-bed:—

" would thou shouldest know, dearest friend, that the blessed Christ hath, by His grace, revealed to me that the end of my life is near at hand. Wherefore, if thou wouldest find me alive, when thou hast received this letter hasten to come to St. Mary of the Angels. For, shouldest thou come after Saturday, thou wilt not find me living. And bring with thee cloth or haircloth in which to wrap my body, and wax for my burying. I pray thee, also, to bring of the meats which thou wert wont to give me when I was sick at Rome———"

When he had gone thus far, he stopped short, raised his eyes to heaven, and bade the writer cease, adding that Giacobba was already on her way, bringing all that he wished. Almost immediately the janitor or porter of the convent came to announce the arrival of the lady and her family, sons, and servants. She had brought the wax for his funeral, and a provision of the food he liked, which consisted, the Bollandist editor informs us, of certain little cakes made with almonds and sugar, called in Rome *mortiarioli*. There is something infinitely touching in this movement of human weakness — the one last, simple, childlike liking, half appetite, half reminiscence, stimulated by the affectionate wish to give his friend something to do for him. The janitor, says the legend, came to ask—shocked, it would seem, in his monkish delicacy, by such an application—whether, in defiance of all rules to the contrary, the visitor was to be admitted. Francis, on his part, is said to have answered casuistically, that laws did not hold in such a case; and that the lady, who had nourished and helped so many of the brethren, was worthy to be received even into their holy house; where, accordingly, as the story goes, the Signora Giacobba was admitted, and ministered to her friend for the last days of his life. The Bollandist, however, treats this story as incredible, and we agree with him; for Francis was not a man to relax in any-

thing the severity of the Rule for his own comfort. There can be no doubt, however, about the authenticity of the interrupted letter, whether it was thrown aside by weakness or by the difficulties in the way, or whether it was indeed anticipated by the arrival of the person to whom it was addressed.

There is another incident mentioned by Bonaventura which it is difficult to place in its proper chronological order, or to decide whether it occurred on the arrival of Francis at the Portiuncula, or if he had himself carried outside the convent gate to accomplish over again his renunciation of all things. "Desiring," says his biographer, "to give a true proof to all men that he had no longer anything in common with the world in that grievous and painful sickness, he laid aside his habit, and laid himself prostrate on the bare earth, that in the last hour in which the enemy would attack him with all his fury, he might wrestle naked with his natural adversary. Lying thus on the earth, with his face raised, according to his custom, to heaven, and intent upon its glory, with his left hand he covered the wound in his right side, and said to his brethren, "I have done my part; may Christ teach you to do yours." This curious solemn putting aside of all earthly things was very probably suggested by the Benedictine custom of placing the dying upon hair-cloths sprinkled with ashes, which is described in Mr. Church's admirable "Life of St. Anselm," page 66. This was not required by the Rule of the Brothers Minor, but Francis was greedy of any possibility of self-humiliation. Speaking, it would appear, of the same incident, Celano describes him as extending himself on the earth, clothed in a hair shirt, and causing ashes to be sprinkled on him, as a sign that he was soon to become dust and ashes. To the mournful group of brethren round him there must have been a special

solemnity in such a scene. It must have recalled to some of them a corresponding scene which had taken place at the beginning, as this did at the end of his religious life. In the agitation and excitement of his youth, when his early persecutors confronted him, in the bishop's palace at Assisi, he had thrown off everything that belonged to his earthly father and the world, and appeared before the astonished people, as his costly garments dropped from him, in the same scant scourge, the vest of penitence. Twenty years before the son of Pietro Bernardone had made that solemn renunciation of the world; and now Brother Francis, less than the least of all saints, stripped himself even of the religious dress in which so many a rude penitent of the time trusted for salvation, and laid himself down, clad in the emblem of sorrow and suffering, bare and undefended, in his own simple person, before his God—a man who trusted in nothing but Christ—not in his holiness, his miracles, his Order, nor his reputation, but only in his Lord. No profounder lesson could be given to those wondering, simple monks, or to the still more deeply marvelling world, to which the very robe of a Brother Minor seemed a protection against both death and devil.

While the dying saint thus lay extended like an offering upon the altar, with his sightless eyes turned to heaven, and all his soul given up to God, one of the four brethren who had charge of him, the one whom he called specially his *guardiano*, and whom he had bound himself to obey, came to him with a tunic in his hand. Thus the quaint peculiarities of the time break upon the everlasting human significance of the story, making it in a moment mediæval and archæological. This new-comer broke through the sad group, with the garment which was not the one Francis had just laid aside, and addressed him, "knowing his wish

by divine inspiration." "I bring thee this," he said, "as to one who has made himself poor for the love of God : receive it by the command of holy obedience." "Then," the narrative goes on, "the holy man rejoiced with great gladness of heart when he saw that he had kept faith with his lady, Poverty, even to the end ; and raising his hands to heaven, he gave thanks to Christ his Lord that, being delivered from every burden, he was free to go to Him. And all these things he did out of his zeal for poverty, so that he would not even have a habit but what was lent him by another. For in all things assuredly he desired to be conformed to Christ crucified, who hung naked upon the cross in poverty and pain."

When Francis was carried back to his death-bed he called his followers around him to bid them farewell, and spoke to them as his failing strength permitted. And here again occurs a scene which would seem to evidence the disputes of two parties in the Order, rather than any intentional action on the part of Francis himself. The story on the one hand—and it is that given by Celano—is, that crossing his arms across his breast, as Jacob did when he blessed the children of Joseph, he laid his hand upon a head at the right and left hand. He then asked who it was upon whom his right hand had fallen, as if he had been once more, in a slightly different way, recurring to his favourite divination to discover what was God's will. When he was told that it rested upon the head of Elias, he answered, "Thus I willed that it should be," and blessed him accordingly as the head of the Order with a comprehensive and all-embracing blessing.

The other version of the story is, that he called for Bernard, "his first-born," and that as Bernard out of humility placed Elias above him, the hand of the dying saint was placed upon his head in mistake ;

upon which Francis said, "This is not the head of my son Bernard," and crossing his hands as Jacob did, thus conveyed the blessing to its original destination, viz. to Bernard, and not to Elias. This later version would not appear, however, to be worthy of any credit, as there never seems to have been a question of Bernard succeeding Francis, or being placed by him in the first place, which Elias for a long time had undoubtedly filled. The story probably arose in later times, when Elias had scandalized and divided the Order, and when new legends had sprung up, instinctively coloured by the knowledge of a later generation. All that Bonaventura says of any such event is this: "And as all the brethren surrounded him, he extended his hands over them in the form of a cross, crossing his arms in the form of that sign which he had ever loved; and so he blessed all the brethren, whether present or absent, in the name and in the power of the Crucified.' 'Farewell, my children in the fear of the Lord,' he said. 'Great tribulation and temptations will come upon you; but blessed are they who persevere in the work which they have begun. And now I go to God, to whom I commend you all.'"

When this farewell had been said, it is evident that Francis felt, even the family which hung about him, the most intimate refuge of his heart on earth to be put aside; and was no longer conscious of any human shadow, or suggestion, or thought of any duty or responsibility between him and his God. And as he had lived like Christ, in the simplest literal adoption of all His precepts, so he desired to die with his heart and eyes intent upon the end of his Master's life. In all this there is so perfect a simplicity, and an absence so absolute of any reference to the marks of the Lord Jesus, which it is supposed he bore about in his body, that the reader's waning traditionary belief

in the Stigmata cannot but be sadly shaken; for even the utmost reach of modesty and humility possible to man could scarcely have banished from the mind of one so distinguished, all thoughts of, or reference to, these dear marks of uttermost communion. His mind was full of the last details of his Master's passion; but yet he never raised his dying hand to contemplate upon it the wound which was a copy of Christ's wounds, nor breathed one sigh of supreme joy and pain on that account into any friendly soul. Everything is natural, unaffected, and real, about that deathbed. When he had said all he had to say, he commanded the Gospels to be brought to him, and the passage to be read beginning *Ante diem festum paschæ*—"Before the feast of the Passover," the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of St. John. When the reading was ended, he began with his broken and feeble voice to sing, *Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi*—"With my voice have I cried unto the Lord"—the 142nd Psalm. How solemnly through the still cell, over the heads of the kneeling brethren, must these words have sounded: "I cried unto Thee, O Lord, and said, Thou art my hope and portion in the land of the living: consider my complaint, for I am brought very low. Oh, deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me: bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name: the righteous shall compass me about, for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me."

Such, so far as any record informs us, were the last words of Francis. They rose trembling on that voice, once so sonorous, full, and sweet, which had praised God by all the Umbrian ways, and proclaimed his name from East to West, to Gaul and Spaniard, to Turk and Saracen, in knights' castles and seamen's galleys—wherever the herald of God could penetrate

It sank now in dying quavers under the humble roof in that rude and miserable cell, where not a luxury, not a comfort, solaced the closing life, but only love and faith—those supreme riches which are the inheritance of the poor. Amid the brethren kneeling round him, weeping or exulting as personal feeling or spiritual triumph rose highest in them, Francis lay absorbed, wrapt in that ineffable separation, in which the shadow of death enfolds the still living, singing, with interrupted breath and pathetic pauses, his death-song—*Me expectant justi donec retribuas mihi*, says the Latin version—"The righteous wait expectant till I receive my recompense." Where could words more appropriate be found for the close of such a life? The companions of his toil around, the cloud of witnesses above—his brethren on earth and his brethren in heaven waiting till the end was accomplished, and his life made perfect.

"Laudato sia mio Signore per suor nostra morte corporale——"

Such had been the outburst of his heart when the intimation was made to him that his Sister Death was on her way. Now she had come and lulled him into that shadowy land between the two worlds. His voice came faint and ever fainter as the dim, languid distance swallowed him up. And his Master, whom he loved, and his brethren, the saints, in those heavens so full of awe and rapture, waited—and the mortal love below wept and waited—and the voice failed and sank, and died away—and the recompense came.

Such was the end of the life of Francis of Assisi—a life filled with one great master-thought which dominated all other motives of humanity and impulses of nature—the desire to be like Christ. For this he gave up everything that makes existence sweet, choosing the worst, and hardest, and bitterest of all lots. His

fashion of living is not ours, nor is it always possible to follow with our sympathy that literal, childlike rendering of every incident in the life of the Master, which sometimes looks fantastical and often unmeaning. He was a man of his time, and could live only under the conditions which that time allowed. He made visible to a literal, practical, unquestioning age the undeniable and astounding fact that the highest of all beings chose a life of poverty, hardship, and humbleness; that He chose submission instead of resistance, love instead of oppression, peace and forgiveness instead of revenge and war. Christ had died in their hearts, as said the legend of that Christmas at Greccia; and, as in one of the bold and artless pictures just then beginning to yield to a more refined and subtle art, Francis set forth before the world the image of his Master. The Son of man was lifted up, as on another cross, before the eyes of Umbria, before all Italy, warlike and wily, priest and baron, peasant and pope. In this world Francis knew nothing, acknowledged nothing, cared for nothing save Christ and Him crucified—except indeed Christ's world, the universe redeemed, the souls to be saved, the poor to be comforted, the friends to be cherished, the singing birds and bubbling fountains, the fair earth and the sweet sky. Courteous, tender, and gentle as any paladin, sweet-tongued and harmonious as any poet, liberal as any prince, was the barefooted beggar and herald of God. We ask no visionary reverence for the Stigmata, no wondering belief in any miracle. As he stood, he was as great a miracle as any then existing under God's abundant, miraculous heavens; more wonderful than are the day and night, the sun and the dew; only less wonderful than that great Love which saves the world, and which it was his aim and destiny to reflect and show forth

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE breath was scarcely out of Francis's worn and weary body before the worship of his relics began. All Assisi came pouring down towards the Portiuncula at the great news—not mourning as for the loss of a friend; but exulting that at last their object had been achieved, and that their saint belonged to them beyond any possibility of alienation. "As soon as the departure of the holy father was heard of," says Bonaventura, "all the people came together to see with their own eyes what might remove any doubt from their minds, and satisfy the love of their hearts." It would be difficult, however, to believe in the pure love of the Assisans, which filled them with so vociferous a joy on the death of their townsman and friend. Motives less elevated, we fear, will explain it better. They had secured his person, his power, the miracles that were sure to follow, the more substantial benefit of throngs of pilgrims, and a distinction for their city such as had no parallel in Umbria. With this proud consciousness in their minds, and all the thirst of popular inquirers for a wonder and prodigy, they poured out of the city gates towards the little convent low down on the edge of the plain, "praising God," says Celano, and saying, "Praised and blessed art Thou O Lord our God, who has given such a

precious treasure to us unworthy. Praise and glory be to Thee, ineffable Trinity." Thus the entire town made its way, with songs of triumph, to the dark little house enveloped in the shadow of death, where there were still some unreasonable brethren left, who, with sad hearts and many tears, lamented their companion and master. And now the historians permit themselves their full freedom in the description of those mysterious wounds which the modesty and humility of Francis were supposed to have hidden up to this moment with so scrupulous a care. Bonaventura's narrative is perhaps the most full, but all the early biographers agree substantially in the details.

"Now were discovered in those blessed members the nails which by the Divine power had been marvellously fashioned out of his own flesh, so that on being pressed on either side they moved to the other. In his body was found also an open wound in the side, made by no human hand, like to the wound which our Redeemer bore for us, and from which issued forth the sacraments of redemption and regeneration. The appearance of the nails was black like iron; the wound in the side was red and rounded, after the appearance of a beautiful rose. All the rest of his body, which had been dark by nature, and become darker by reason of his infirmities, was now of a marvellous whiteness, and so dazzling as to show forth the brightness of the state of glory. His limbs seemed to those who touched them so soft and supple as to appear like the limbs of a young child, thus figuring the innocence with which he was adorned. Now beholding the black nails in that white flesh, and the wound in the side ruddy as a rose in spring, it is no marvel that all who saw them were filled with wonder

and admiration. The sons wept for the loss of so beloved a father, and yet were filled with unspeakable gladness when they kissed the seals of the King of Heaven. The novelty of the miracle changed their tears into joy, and the understanding remained in amazement at the sight."

This account is virtually the same as the first statement of Celano, who follows it with assumptions of praise to God, and honour to Francis. The Three Companions are much more brief, but equally distinct. "Many who did not believe in the man of God, and doubted the existence of his Stigmata, were by the cogency of the truth, and the good working of God, changed into faithful preachers, and filled with praise." It is very hard to understand how contemporaries could have made any mistake on such a subject; and still more hard to imagine that it was an utter fiction to which all those men thus committed themselves. Whether it is not harder still to disbelieve all the evidence against the Stigmata, the vagueness of assertion, which is all we have in their favour, the absolute silence of Francis, the absence of all reference to such a wonder even in the conversation and writings of his deathbed, is a question which every reader must solve for himself. It is to us impossible to understand how Francis could have kept such perfect silence on the subject; and why, at least after his death, some formal and solemn proof was not taken of so wonderful a miracle. But it is at the same time almost equally impossible to believe that Leo, Angelo, and Ruffino were setting their seal to an absolute lie.

The accounts vary also as to the numbers who saw the body. The Three Companions say "all the brethren and many seculars." "A great multitude of people," says Celano, "were admitted (curious ex-

pression), not only to kiss, but also to see the same wounds," as if some mystery of darkness had still been kept up about the sacred corpse so far as the multitude was concerned. "Many of the citizens of Assisi were admitted to see and kiss the sacred Stigmata," repeats Bonaventura, with greater moderation; and he proceeds to tell us of Hieronymo, "a certain soldier, a learned and prudent man, held in high estimation in the city," who doubted, like another Thomas, and more boldly and eagerly than the rest moved the nails in the presence of his fellow-citizens, and touched with his own hands the hands and feet of the holy man—an evidence which would be very satisfactory had we received Hieronymo's own word for it; or had not the presence of a Thomas become a recognized necessity in hagiography. He is said to have "confirmed it by oath on the Holy Gospels"—which is very strong; but still some fuller satisfaction is necessary, as to who Hieronymo, or Girolamo as he would probably be called in Assisi, was.

It was on Saturday, the 4th October, that the saint died, and all the rest of the day and night solemn court was held at the Portiuncula over what remained of him. "All the brethren and children of the holy father who had been called to witness his departure, with the great multitude of people who were come together on the night in which Christ's glorious confessor departed to Him, passed the night in the praising of God, so that it seemed not to be a requiem for the dead, but the rejoicing of angels." It is easy to imagine the excited crowds which must have thronged in and out of the little church through the long October night. Signora Giacobba from Rome, according to the story, had brought wax for the burial, and the poor little place no doubt was twinkling all about the altar

with an unusual magnificence of lights. If the pale figure, so worn and wasted, lay there, where he had knelt so often, in the solemnity of death, to be seen and worshipped by the faithful, we are not told. There can be no doubt that such would have been the case with the remains of any other man of equal sanctity and fame. But the question of the Stigmata makes it doubtful. However that might be, no doubt the tiny shrine was overflowing with worshippers—crowds continually changing, who made their brief devotions, and gazed their eager gaze at whatever was afforded them to look at, and departed again into the mellow Italian night, to tell their tale outside to those who were pressing to enter in their turn. One seems to see as in a picture that strange scene—the dark-frocked brethren, who must have been kneeling motionless about the bier or on the altar steps, if no bier was there; and the shifting, fluctuating, awe-stricken, yet anxious crowds, losing themselves in all the dark corners, faintly visible, head after head bowed in worship or raised in curiosity, between the darkling door and the blazing altar. Italy has changed so little, that no one who has ever witnessed her popular devotions, and seen the changing, varying ranks, reaching to the very door, and often far outside, all kneeling, all devout, all silent, with here and there an upturned face or pair of clasped hands, catching the light, can have any difficulty in realizing this scene.

As soon as morning dawned, the mass awakened to another manifestation of their reverence and strange joy. Why the funeral should have been so hastened we cannot tell; nor can we contradict the doubts of those who see in this speedy sepulture a desire to prevent any formal inspection of the supposed Stigmata. The multitude tore down the branches of the trees, no

doubt spoiling that wood in which Francis loved to pray, and which plays so large a part in what we may call the domestic history of his earlier years. Sprigs of sweet myrtle and box and resinous fragrant pine were doubtless strewed along the way, as is still the custom of Italy. With branches of the sweet grey olive, oak boughs, and luxuriant foliage of chestnut; with "innumerable lights," tapers and torches, hymns and canticles; the great throng gathered ready for the procession. All the clergy of Assisi, chanting solemn hymns, came out to meet the bier, and thus they climbed the hill to the birthplace of the saint, the city of his toils and tears and blessing. When they came to St. Damiano an affecting pause was made. Clara within, with all her maidens, waited the last visit of their father and friend. Slowly the triumphant crowd defiled into the church of the nuns, hushing, let us hope, their songs of joy, their transports and gratulations, out of respect to the grief which dwelt there, and could scarcely, by all the arguments of family pride, or the excitement of this universal triumph, be brought to rejoice. The bier was set down within the chancel, the coffin opened, and opened also was the little window through which the nuns received the Sacrament on ordinary occasions. To this little opening the pale group of nuns, ten of them, with Clara at their head, came marching silently, with tears and suppressed cries. Clara herself, even in face of that multitude, could not restrain her grief. "Father, father, what will become of us?" she cried out; "who will care for us now, or console us in our troubles?" "Virgin modesty," says Celano, stopped her lamentations, and with a miserable attempt at thanksgiving, reminding herself that the angels were rejoicing at his coming, and all was gladness on his

arrival in the city of God, the woman who had been his closest friend in this world, whose sympathy he had sought so often, kissed the pale hands—"splendid hands," says Celano, in his enthusiasm, "adorned with precious gems and shining pearls"—and disappeared from the little window with her tears into the dim convent behind, where nobody could reprove her sorrow. This pathetic last meeting in the midst of all the noise and vulgar satisfaction of the crowd is doubly touching in its brevity, the only real outcry of nature for the life so soon extinguished, so deeply valuable, which we are permitted to hear.

The procession moved on again "with great joy and exultation," the cries and songs no doubt all the louder from the compulsory pause, perhaps the compulsory tears which had vindicated nature—and proceeded to the Cathedral of Assisi, where the body of Francis was laid. "In the sacred place, but then more sacred, they deposited the most sacred body," says Celano, with a quaint expansion characteristic of his style. This was on the Sunday, not twenty-four hours after his death—certainly a very speedy interment. They laid him in the very heart of his native town, in the place where he had learned his earliest lesson, and preached his first sermon. The shopkeeper's son, the young gay bourgeois leader of the revellers, jongleur, and king of feasts—Cecco Bernardone, who must have been the contemporary, familiarly known from his cradle, of half the men at least who thus attended him with songs and shouts to his grave—was henceforward more than the king, the saint of Assisi, its grand distinction to Italy and the world.

It is painful to have to add that four years later, when the great convent church dedicated to him was ready to receive the remains of the saint, a conflict

took place between the townsfolk and the Order for the possession of that precious body. It is revolting to think of such a struggle, but it was not unnatural to the age; and that the victory finally rested with the Franciscans, after many violent struggles and the free use of interdicts and every description of spiritual missile, seems to be indisputable. He lies there under the great altar, as tradition tells, but no one knows the precise spot of his grave; and a mysterious legend has crept about, whispered in the twilight for ages, that far underneath, lower even than the subterranean church, the great saint, erect and pale, with sacred drops of blood upon his five wounds, and an awful silence round him, waits rapt in some heavenly meditation, for the moment when he, like his Lord, and with his Lord, shall rise again. In the meantime his memory possesses the sacred old Umbrian city, musing over its past upon the slope of Apennine. Life went out from it, once over all Italy and to the ends of the earth; but now its existence is over, its part in the world played. Only the pilgrims that come from far, only the feeble, languid interest of travellers who seek the scene in which a great figure of history lived and died, not eager crowds believing in a saint, haunt its streets and disturb the silence. The work of Francis in its grandest phase is over; but the memory of a soul so pure, so simple, so loyal and tender and courageous, can never die.

We have no space to enter into the details of the canonization of Francis, which took place two years after his death, in the year 1228, under the auspices of the reigning Pope, Gregory IX. The day consecrated to him in the Roman calendar is the 4th of October, the day on which he died; and the popular devotion which did all but deify his name in the

immediately surrounding ages, is yet warm and profound in the church he loved so well. Before the century ended the great early Master of Italian Art had lent his genius to the celebration of the humble name of Francis; and the greatest of all Italian poets, in his weird and wonderful wanderings through the unseen world, had met the saint in the fourth circle of Paradise, that radiant planet known to us as the Sun, the home of those who burn with the everlasting love of God "in seraphic ardour." Dante pauses in his marvellous journey to give a full narrative of the life of the beloved saint, his brother poet, the spouse of poverty, of all popular heroes the one most stainless and blameless. Assisi he says no longer must be called Ascesi (kindled), but rather Orient, the East, as from it has risen another sun. Thus the greatest lights of genius which have ever risen on Italy, identified the poor and humble apostle; to whom since then many a devout heart has turned, as to a living epistle such as may be read of all men, a true and touching Imitation of Christ.

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